THE TRAVELLER IN THE FUR CLOAK

STANLEY J. WEYMAN

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By Stanley J. Weyman

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CHAPTER I

Into the Shadow

I own that I was to blame, that I was hasty, cross-grained and aggressive ; and I shall never cease to regret it. But I had some reason, at the time it seemed to me that I had good reason, to be short-tempered. And if Perceval Ellis had recognized this and made allowances for my position—however, it is too late now to consider what might have happened in other circumstances and had we been different men.

It was at Wittenberg on the Elbe, where we arrived on a close, thunderous afternoon, the sky low and black above us, that the trouble came to a head. We had left Iglau on the 18th of July, our departure hastened by the Armistice which laid Austria, the last independent power in Germany, at the feet of Napoleon. The hopes which Aspern had raised had been crushed on the heights of Wagram ; and for us Metternich had become inaccessible. Stadion, the Minister, whose star had clearly set, had received us only by stealth, Gentz had tearfully pressed on us our passports. An English Mission at a Court now dependent on our enemies was plainly out of place, and though we had been admitted to take leave, and had received assurances—and something more, which it behoved us to convey as quickly as possible to London—the affrighted faces about us had warned us to withdraw while we might. It was manifest that the Ball Platz doubted its power to protect us, and feared a repetition of the tragedy of Rastadt for which it might be held responsible.

A secret and special Mission is seldom more than a post of observation, and when it is accredited to a Court nominally hostile—as Austria was in the year '9—has

always something of the equivocal. But a Mission of this kind, which it may become necessary to repudiate, is the one plum which the Office reluctantly resigns to youth; and what young diplomatist ever hesitated to accept the gift, or did not feel his heart beat high as he set his foot on the ladder which was to raise him in a surprisingly short time to Paris or to Petersburg? What young diplomatist ever set forth on such a Mission without rejoicing in his independence, or ever doubted his power to deal with the very nicest emergency that could arise?

Certainly not I, when eight months earlier I had left London on H.M. sloop-of-war *Bustard*, and hastened by way of the Mediterranean—for Europe was closed to us—to Vienna. And at first all had smiled on the Envoy Extraordinary. I had been received in the highest quarters, *sous cape* indeed, but graciously, the overtures I had been empowered to make had been welcomed, assurances had been given me. It was acknowledged that Austria, hemmed in by foes, could look only to the sea for a diversion, and even the question of subsidies fell —*chose étrange!*—into the second place. Let England strike, and Austria would know how to prove her gratitude. But time—time was everything. The blow must be struck in Hanover, and the sooner the better.

I did what I could. Thrice Klatz the messenger, running, I am bound to own, great risk, but aided by his connections in the country, carried my despatches to Hamburg. Thence they were forwarded by smugglers' post to Heligoland and so to London. Then on his third return the blow fell.

I might have foreseen it, for the Office did but follow precedent. I had been too successful for my own interests. A Mission which, it now seemed probable, would be crowned with success, was too rich a prize for a youngster with little interest. Klatz brought back a letter, in the Chief's own hand, commending me in handsome terms—and superseding me. Perceval Ellis would come out to take charge. He had already started and would reach the Austrian Court by the end of May. Enclosed was my appointment as Secretary to the Mission.

It was a bitter pill, but in the *pépinière* in which I was

trained the service first was the primary rule, and I say it with feeling, that if Ellis had met me as I was prepared to meet him, he would have had no ground to complain of my loyalty. But Perceval came out, jealous of his authority, he held himself *boutonné* from the first, and though I was the only person who could put him in possession of the situation, or indicate the safe men, he kept me at arm's length. Then—and this was no aid to a good understanding between us—from the moment of his arrival things took a turn for the worse. The Austrians failed to follow up their successes. The Archduke Charles stood by, while Napoleon made good his losses. By the first week of July Wagram had shattered our hopes and left us no option but to retire from a Court at which we had no longer a footing.

Immediately there had arisen the question which was to mean so much to us—and was to divide us. We had, as I have hinted, despatches of the most confidential nature in our hands, the more valuable seeing that they were the sole fruit of our Mission. They embraced some promises, more assurances, a few words signed by an illustrious hand—and, alas, at odds with more public words signed by the same hand. In a word, they were the seeds from which a new Coalition might one day arise. But over and above these we had proofs, as private as they had been costly to obtain, of Napoleon's plan for a new marriage—whispers, and something more than whispers, of the divorce and wedding which six months later were to shock Europe. Naturally it was of importance that no French eye should alight on these documents, while on the other hand it was probable that, if it became known that they were in our possession, an attempt would be made to obtain them at any cost.

To allow these papers to pass out of our hands, even into Klatz's, was out of the question. We must convey them ourselves, and the point which my chief had to decide was—by which route should we withdraw? We might go by Constantinople and the long road of the Mediterranean, and this route, though not free from risk, was in my opinion the safer. But we might be many weeks at sea, and we should certainly lag behind events.

Instead of arriving with a flourish of trumpets and a burst of news, sufficient to fill the columns of the *Gazette* and to mask our defeat, we should sneak into Downing Street as dead men out of mind. For the memory of the Office is short.

The only alternative was relying on our immunity as a Mission to post across Germany with Hamburg or Memel as our objective. Both seaports were in enemy hands, and to leave them might be as difficult as to reach them. Then, to reach them we must travel many days and nights across Saxony, Prussia, Mecklenburg, all hostile lands ; we must travel over bad roads, exposed at every post-house and every halting place to the curiosity of German police or French patrols ; and with the certainty that Napoleon—if he saw cause—would no more respect our claim to privilege than he had respected the sovereignty of Baden in the case of the Duc d'Enghien, or the neutrality of Saxony, where he had arrested our envoy, and ransacked his papers.

Gentz, who had been our principal link with Metternich, undertook to furnish us with passports for the overland journey ; he could not do otherwise. But he urged us so earnestly to go by sea that it was clear that he gravely feared that the credentials would not be respected, and that his government would be held responsible for the catastrophe.

How I might have decided, had the lead been mine, and the credit to be gained by a speedy return been also for me, I cannot say. As things were, I supported Gentz.

But the last word lay, of course, with my chief ; and Ellis, naturally deliberate and trained to a meticulous caution, seemed for once to have changed moods with me. He decided, and with little hesitation, on the overland journey. He foresaw that were he the first to reach London with the news of the Armistice, he would gain some credit and might hope to veil under a great show of energy the real failure of his Mission.

At any rate that was how I explained a decision at odds with his character. He had but five years and an uncle in the Cabinet the advantage of me—with much less experience of the country we were to traverse. It

might have been thought, then, that he would open his mind to me, and in that case I am confident that I should have loyally entered into his hopes. But he would not declare himself. The reserve which had marred our relations from the first continued to part us at this crisis. And I found, I am afraid—God forgive me for it, as things turned out !—a sly pleasure in probing his motives and pricking him to the verge of avowing them. Nor, I fear, was I quite unaware that my opposition had the effect of hardening him in his resolve.

" Certainly it seems to me," I would argue, " that we are running a considerable risk, Ellis. And for no adequate reason."

" H'm ! " Perceval's answers when he was riding the high horse often began in that way. " H'm ! " Then with his snuff-box in one hand and a pinch delicately poised in the fingers of the other—an attitude that always provoked me, for I knew it to be copied from Metternich— " Possibly ! Possibly it may appear so. But there are things that I have to consider very carefully, Cartwright. I bear a heavy, a very heavy responsibility." And his eyes would seek the distance, as if he lived under a burden of thought unshared by common men. " It is of vital, the most vital importance that the Office should have this information as speedily as possible. The very fate of Europe, my dear Cartwright, may depend upon it. And therefore I must not think of myself. No ! No ! "

" True," I would reply between irritation and amusement. " But if we never arrive with the information ? "

The gesture with which he thrust the idea aside was superb. " Ah, to be sure ! Well, we must face that. But I think that you exaggerate the risk. I do indeed. One might suppose, listening to you, that we were proposing to cross France itself ! "

" We are going to do something much more serious," I retorted. " If we were going to cross France it would be with French passports and even Nap would hesitate to kidnap us *à la face du soleil.* But we are going to do quite another thing, Chief. We are going to plunge into the dark. We are going to traverse a country unknown and uncharted, for, since we knew it, Germany is another

land—a country as much subject to France, more shame to it, as if it were little Luxemburg or Cleves! We are going to do that with Saxon or Prussian passports of which Davout—Davout, the real Governor of Germany—will make no more, if he come across us and have an object to serve, than of a piece of paper! And we are going to do it though, believe me, there is not between the Reisengebirge and the Baltic a policeman or a *douanier*, a change-house or a custom house that isn't as much under Napoleon's orders as if Germany were French! Look at poor Schill! Was ever a more abortive rising? At first it looked as if he might effect something. But he is dead and disowned, and the only result of his attempt is that French troops are everywhere patrolling the country and putting out the embers. If we fall in with one of these parties——"

Perceval's glance at me was a very arid one. "My dear Cartwright," pompously. "This is the effect of being too long on the Continent. You are obsessed by Napoleon and his power. The thought of him paralyses you as it paralysed these luckless Austrians. He casts a shadow——"

"Ay, he does," I cried, taking him up rather more sharply than became me. "A deep black shadow! And you will find that that shadow stretches across Germany and we may very well be lost in the gloom of it. By all means, if you decide on it, make the venture. But make it with your eyes open, for it is, believe me, a plunge into the unknown. For sixteen or eighteen days if you make for Hamburg and three weeks if you make for Memel we shall be travelling in constant peril, liable to be arrested—and worse—at every post-house and every town-gate."

"My good fellow," he rejoined, a little contemptuously. "You see everything *en noir*. You have too much imagination."

He was my Chief, and I refrained. I did not tell him that he had none.

"And you forget," he continued, "that Klatz has performed this journey which you make out to be so formidable more than once. He has been to Hamburg three times in the last six months."

" Klatz is a German," I returned. " He knows every turn and twist of the business. He has his connections along the road, and even so, it was necessary, as you know, to give him a *douceur* of a hundred pounds for each journey. And consider, that if we reach Hamburg in safety, we have still to find the means of leaving the country."

" Then we must go as Klatz's letters go," with decision. " That will be as we are advised when we reach Hamburg. In the meantime," with a return to his usual pomposity, " we must shut our eyes to the risk, and—h'm—think only of the public service. See, if you please, that nothing is left behind, burn with care all *brouillons*, and have all ready for a start on Wednesday. Kaspar will see the carriage packed. The Prussian passports should meet us at the frontier, but I will see Gentz about that. A little forethought, a little prevision, my dear secretary, and the difficulties will disappear. Some discomfort we shall no doubt encounter, but personal considerations must give way to—to higher interests."

I saw that I could not move him, I am not sure that I wished to move him. His complacency and his determination to ignore the injury that he had done me—albeit innocently—irritated me, and I had argued in a spirit of opposition when alas, as I now see, a single frank, kindly word might have brought us together, and placed us on a better footing. For with all his little mannerisms Perceval was a good fellow at bottom.

And yet I was right. The extent to which Europe was then closed to us can to-day hardly be understood. We had a footing in Portugal—Talavera was fought in the very month of which I am writing—and some relations, albeit touchy—with Denmark. But upon all between those distant points—and immensely distant they were when roads were few, and travelling slow—lay thick darkness, the shadow of Napoleon. He had overthrown Austria at Austerlitz, Prussia at Jena, Russia at Friedland, and now at Wagram he had taught a final lesson to a prostrate, terror-stricken, divided Germany. The north-west of that vast land he governed through his brothers. The south-west, the Confederation of the Rhine, was his

creature. Prussia, a remnant of its former greatness, survived on his sufferance, its fortresses held by French troops, its king an exile from his own capital. From the Rhine to the far Niemen, from the Baltic to the Alps, his word was law, his hint an order, his officers pro-consuls. He had built up again the Empire of Charlemagne.

One power alone still raised its head against him. One country alone still stood between him and universal dominion; and all that he could do he had done and was doing to vanquish it, to eradicate its very name, to wipe its memory from the countries he ruled. He had closed the Continent to English goods, he had seized or expelled every Englishman, he had driven out our embassies, he had striven to silence our language.

And he had so far succeeded that even for our Foreign Office Europe had become a dark continent. It took in that day a week for the most urgent news to travel from Vienna to Berlin; but many, many weeks would elapse before the same tidings, slowly filtering through secret channels, became known in Downing Street. Smugglers with some regularity carried letters from the Elbe to Heligoland; thence a packet crossed at intervals to Harwich. Less frequently a similar post ran between Memel and Husum on the Danish coast. But the information which thus trickled through was late and scanty, and I had stated no more than the truth when I said that we were plunging into the dark, into a Germany uncharted and unknown.

Withal on the 18th—the 18th of July, 1809—at six in the morning we left Iglau, His Excellency and I travelling in the carriage which I had bought on my arrival, Klatz and Perceval's servant, Kaspar, attending us in a post calash.

CHAPTER II

Two Scraps of Paper

And for some days all went so well with us that if Perceval had been given to badinage, in place of being a person of much and solemn dignity, he might have had the laugh of me. Screened by the troops thrown out to cover the Archduke's right wing, and under favour of the Armistice, we made good progress, our worst privation a crowded lodging at night, our gravest hindrance a thronged road by day. For Gentz had kept his promises. Everywhere word of our coming had preceded us. The best quarters had been retained for us—under canvas if no better offered—and from one headquarters to another we were forwarded with care and received with honour. Across the more lonely tracts, or where danger threatened, we were escorted by a handful of hussars, and the ring of their spurs and the clatter of their scabbards became as much a feature of our progress and as monotonous to the ear as the dull level of the Bohemian plain became to the eye.

July day after July day saw us leaving some tiny town, perched on a low hill whence its towers and steeples looked down on the cornfields and vine-lands, and making for just such another town perched on a twin hill and visible some hours before we reached it. I have said that we were received with honour and sped on our way with care; but time and again there was more than this—so much more that even the heart of the diplomatist, trained to mark and learn and betray nothing, was touched by the wistful looks that followed us, as if with us departed the last gleam of hope, the last spark of independence. Metternich and Stadion might lay their misfortunes at our door, might sneer at England's slowness to move and curse her caution. But the staff-officers and the like with whom we had to do knew nothing of *la haute politique*, and discerned in us only a succour which the fortune of war had cut off.

However, I must not dwell on this. Suffice it that on the 24th we reached Prague, that ancient city, the home of Wallenstein, the battle ground of the sects, as mediaeval as when the Thirty Years' War ringed it about with fire. We crossed the famous bridge with its monstrous statues, and on the 25th at Teschen we passed—under the protection of a *parlementaire*—from the Austrian to the Saxon lines, and from friendship to a mute and guarded hostility. Nor was this the worst. Hitherto we had been protected from the graver disorders of the roads. Troops had been halted to give us passage, convoys had been drawn aside for us. But henceforth we struggled forward in the full current, jostled and delayed by all the flotsam and jetsam that floats on the ebb-tide of war. We in our turn had to halt while guns and reinforcements marched by us, or we thrust a devious way through bands of scowling men—deserters, beggars, camp-vultures, women, who cursed us in all the tongues of Europe. Staff-officers, travelling fast in calashes, flung mud over us. Here the post-house was full and, if we ate at all, we must eat seated in our carriage before the house. There the relays were out, no horses were to be had, and we must wait, watched with hostile eyes by a surly crowd.

We were all of two days travelling from Teschen to Dresden.

We presently discovered—and hardly knew whether to welcome or regret it—that, in place of our friendly escort, our clattering smiling hussars, a single mounted gendarme followed at a distance and kept a watchful eye on our proceedings.

"He is following us," said Perceval after looking back for a time, his long neck stretched out of the carriage.

"Oh, yes, he is following us," I assented. But even I did not then foresee that that little black blur on the road behind us was to grow to so great a cloud of trouble.

We drove into Dresden an hour before sunset, and paused at the gate to show our papers. An officer, tall, spare, correct, unsmiling, advanced to the door of the carriage, "You are staying, Excellency?"

"At the Hotel de Pologne," I said.

"Pardon!" he replied. "At the Stadt Berlin, if it

please you. I am directed to say that your horses are ordered for six o'clock to-morrow."

"But," I objected—it is the business of the secretary to stand between his Chief and the vulgar world—"His Excellency is tired, sir. He has been travelling for some days and proposes to stay here a day to recruit."

"I regret. But the horses are ordered for six. It is an order, gentlemen."

I shrugged my shoulders, while Ellis clothed himself in sulky dignity. But I could see that he was troubled. He was no coward, but lacking imagination he had nerves. And, touchy, he felt every prick to his dignity as if England were injured in his person.

"D—n them!" he said, letting nature for once have its way with him.

"With all my heart," I rejoined. "But in the meantime we must leave at six."

Presently I noticed that steps had been taken to isolate us. We were lodged in a separate wing of the Stadt Berlin, and the servants who waited on us went to and fro with grim faces, said little, and had a *louche* look. I suspected them of being in the police service, but whatever of ill augury this imparted was counteracted by the reflection that the object of the precaution might be merely our safety.

And in any case it was a small matter. It was a trifle beside the perplexity which began on the next day to harass and divide us and at Wittenberg came to a head. The weather was still cloudy and hot, the air oppressive, and Ellis, troubled by the authorities' attitude, had slept ill and was out of temper. Klatz—I have said little of Klatz, but we went much by his advice—was more fussy than ordinary, and Kaspar, a phlegmatic Swiss, seemed to be the only person untouched by circumstances.

Then, the horses given us were poor, and the knowledge that henceforward our way lay across the dull featureless plain of Middle Europe pressed upon us. The thought of its immense unbroken expanses, its flat wastes stretching to the horizon, its forests set dark about pale shimmering lakes, weighed, I remember, strangely on the imagination. Arriving late in the day at Grossenhayn, a little town

on the frontier, we were stopped at the Prussian barrier, required to descend, and ushered into an inner room.

We were received by an officer who, except that the blue of his uniform was darker, might have been the replica of him of Dresden, as sallow, as reticent, as unsmiling. He was as stiff as a ramrod, but I saluted him with due ceremony.

"You expected us?" I said.

"Naturally."

"His Excellency——"

"Excellency?" with a shrug and a sour smile. "Only," bowing slightly, "where he is accredited, I suggest, sir."

It was rather a shock, but I set it down to Prussian churlishness and raised my eyebrows. "Still it is in that character that our Prussian credentials should be awaiting us," I replied.

He took no notice of my remark, but "Your papers to this point, if you please," he said.

I produced them. "You will see that they are special," I said, "and countersigned by——"

"I can read, *mein Herr*!"

The man was brutal, and evidently with intention, but there was nothing to be gained by contending with him. Perceval took a seat with an impassive face, and we waited in silence while the man perused the papers. He did this twice, from time to time holding them up to the light and scanning them with a suspicion that aroused—in me at any rate—a desire to kick him. At length he put down the papers, opened a drawer in the table beside him, and deliberately placed them in the drawer. He locked it and returned the key to his pocket.

"And our new ones?" said I.

"You will proceed with these," he replied, and he took a fresh set from another drawer. "They are drawn in favour of Herren Eils and Wagenmacher, merchants of Hamburg, returning to Hamburg, with their clerk and servant. Gentlemen," raising his hand, as recovering from my astonishment I began to remonstrate, "I am acting under orders, in your interest as well as in that of the State. And my orders are peremptory. If you prefer to return by the way you have come, you are at

liberty to do so, and you will relieve us from embarrassment. I shall then return you your original papers. But if you choose to proceed you will proceed with these. We have, of course, been warned of your coming, the matter has been fully considered, and——"

"The devil it has, sir!" Ellis cried, and unable to contain himself longer, he rose in his wrath, tall, thin, dry. "Are you aware, sir, who I am? Are you aware, sir, of my status as an ambassador relying on that law of nations which is observed by every civilized country? I am, sir, His Britannic Majesty's Envoy, duly accredited to the Court of Vienna, and I claim to proceed as such."

The man smiled his sour smile. He made as if he blew something away. "Piff," he said. "A claim—but a claim, and most equivocal. An Envoy to a State with which your sovereign is at war, as he is at war with us? No, Excellency, be satisfied. We might," darkly, "adopt another course, and I do not know that it would not be wiser. But those whose orders I obey prefer to avoid ambiguities, and in a word those are my instructions. I can neither alter them nor take from them."

Poor Ellis was thunderstruck. I do not know that I was so much surprised, for it was something of this kind that I had foreseen. I remembered Taylor's case. Taylor had been our Minister at Cassel. He had incurred Napoleon's enmity, he had had to withdraw and had done so by way of Prussia at a time when Prussia still pretended to independence. Yet the government had not ventured to allow him to stop in Berlin, but had shepherded him through the country, a virtual prisoner.

It was plain that there was nothing for it but to submit, though it went against the grain. Ellis rode the high horse a while, threatened to appeal to Berlin, threatened to appeal to Hardenberg, the Prussian Minister. But the officer only shrugged his shoulders, and half an hour after we had entered the place we left it, Perceval sallow with rage, and walked down the street to the post-house. The postmaster asked, civilly enough, if we proposed to go farther that day, but my companion in a sulky mood declined to say—he would tell him when we had dined. Poor fellow, he was angry with all the world, and not

least with me—my predictions had been a little too near the truth.

The post-house was but a poor place, with one common room, sunk below the street, and ill-lighted, but as we were late we had it to ourselves. We occupied a small table before the window; Klatz and Kaspar were at the long table in the middle of the room. As we sat waiting impatiently for a *réchauffé*, Perceval unfolded the coarse napkin that lay before him, and "Hallo!" he muttered, "What's this?"

I looked across at him, my attention caught by his tone. "What is it?" I asked.

He did not answer. He was staring at the table. When he raised his eyes it was to look, not at me, but at our two attendants. He saw that they had their backs to us and with a warning glance he slid something across the table. "It was in my napkin," he muttered.

It was a scrap of paper. On it was scrawled in German letters, "Beware of Klatz and the Elster."

"Oh, the devil!" I murmured.

"It was in my napkin," he repeated.

"Umph!" I grunted, and I reversed the bit of coarse yellowish paper. There was nothing on the other side, and having made sure of this I slipped it into my pocket as a stout country wench approached our table with the *Kalbsbraten*.

"What do you make of it?" Ellis asked, when she had withdrawn to fetch the wine I had ordered.

"Well," I said sapiently, "it comes from a friend—or an enemy."

"That does not take us far," he grunted. Following on what had happened in the office, the thing was disturbing.

"No," I answered. "But the whole thing depends on that; on whether it is a friend's warning, or an enemy's snare. That is clear."

"Kaspar can write."

"It is not his writing."

"He may have got someone——"

"To write it? Possibly," I allowed. "I don't think so."

" Well, whoever it is, and whatever it is," with decision, " I shall pay no attention to it."

I agreed. " Probably that will be the wiser course," I said. But I felt no surprise when Perceval's next words betrayed doubt.

" Is there another road," he asked, " that does not pass through Elsterwerde ? "

" I will inquire," I said, " if you will keep Klatz by you after we have done dinner. In any case, I would not go on to-day. We are safe here. That blatant Prussian knows who we are and cannot deny us ; and we shall gain the evening to think it over. If Klatz presses you to go on this evening, say that you are not well."

He nodded. " At the same time I don't believe a word of it," he maintained.

" Nor I—so far. Klatz has served us well and we have every reason to think him faithful. But——"

" But what ? "

" Well, everything is possible."

" But—the Office detailed him, did it not ? "

" Certainly. The man has been in the service at least six years. He was one of the messengers attached to Berlin when I was there in '3. I knew him there. Oh, no doubt his record is all right."

" Then I shall pay no attention to this."

But the seeds of suspicion, once sown, are hard to root up, and H.E. made no demur when I presently sauntered out and with as careless an air as I could assume, lounged towards the inn yard. A wagon had just come in, laden with wounded soldiers, and with it a couple of post carriages, and there was much bustle. I marked, however, an ostler who seemed to be unemployed, and who was standing near the entrance, in talk with a sallow down-looking man, with remarkably black eyebrows. I thought that he would do, and I was approaching the pair when I recognized with a shock that the sallow man with the black eyebrows wore the uniform of a French army postilion, and I sheered off. The man, whether he had remarked my approach or not, moved off also. Still, I saw that it would be wiser to make my inquiries elsewhere, and I strolled down the street.

It was the ordinary street of a small German town, cobble-paved, with a gutter running down the middle, and firewood stacked here and there against the gabled houses. There were a dozen signs swinging over the roadway, their varied hues, with the lines of green shutters, giving a cheerful air to the street. I picked out a saddler's sign and saw a man with an apron twisted about his waist and a dirty leather nightcap on his head lounging at the door. I asked him what sort of a road it was to Elsterwerde, and if the other road to Berlin—I tacitly assumed that there was one—was much longer.

"By Wittenberg? So! It is about six hours longer, *mein Herr.*"

"People go that way?"

"Oh, yes, it is as you please. But it adds six hours."

I thanked him, and after strolling a little farther as if to satisfy my curiosity, I turned back to the post-house. I found Ellis looking out of the low window, Klatz at his elbow. "Klatz wishes us to start," he said.

I yawned. "We could do no more than a couple of German miles," I remarked. "It seems hardly worth while."

Klatz interposed. "Just so, sir," he said, "but with His Excellency's permission that will take us to Elsterwerde. And the Lamb is a good house. This is—it is unfitting His Excellency's position to stay here."

Ellis looked undecided. "What do you say, Cartwright?"

"Oh, I say, stay here," I replied. "Klatz works us too hard. Remember we got off at six. And as we are now but Herren Eils and Wagenmacher of Hamburg we may put up with a little roughness for once. It is in character."

"But the Lamb—such quarters, sir!" Klatz waved his fat hands, "The Lamb to-night and so to Herzberg for dinner to-morrow. If His Excellency will be guided by me——"

"No, Klatz," Perceval answered, his mind made up, I've no doubt, by the other's urgency. "We stay here to-night. Arrange it so, and send Kaspar to the barrier to say that we remain."

I could not be sure—but did I surprise a gleam in Klatz's blue eyes, a trifle out of character with the little man's wonted good humour. If so, it was gone as soon as seen, and might have expressed only the annoyance of one who saw his visions of a rich, greasy supper at his beloved Lamb set aside for a whim. In either case he made no further demur, but left us alone.

"Well, I have discovered," I said, "that there is another road—by Wittenberg. It is six hours longer."

"We are certainly," peevishly, "not going to waste six hours."

"It is as you decide, Chief, of course."

"Why, for all we know, that may be the very road they wish us to take!"

"Precisely."

"Then why——"

"The point is—friend or enemy?" I rejoined. "As I said at the beginning. As I still say. A warning or a trap?"

"I don't believe a word of it!" obstinately. "And I think that we are ill-advised to stay here. But as you have settled it, so let it be. Only, I must press on you, my good fellow, not to see an enemy in every bush!"

After that it may be believed that we did not spend a very cheerful or companionable evening. The post-house, filling up after nightfall with a noisy brawling company, we were forced to share a bedroom, and Perceval, always touchy on the point of dignity, took this ill, and was for blaming me. While I, reflecting that the journey with its drawbacks and risks was not of my choosing, and that the gain if any would be his, was in no mood to take his grumbling with patience.

Moreover I was—I confess it—anxious. The warning, so short and so explicit, troubled me. Did it come from friend or foe? Was it really a warning? Or a snare? Ought we to take the advice or reject it?

The answers to these questions—and everything, the safety of the despatches and our own lives, hung on their accuracy—depended on our reading of Klatz. Was the messenger faithful, or was he plotting against us? His record was good, I could not gainsay that; so good

indeed that before the evening was out Ellis would not hear the matter argued. Having given way so far as to stay over the night, and suffering for his complaisance, he was now convinced that he had been a fool to give way. Every fresh hardship, every petty annoyance, aggravated his peevishness.

And I had nothing to cite to the contrary, except the momentary gleam which I had fancied that I discerned in the man's eyes; and what is more difficult than to convey to another an impression of this kind? Ellis pooh-poohed my idea as pure fancy, hinted that I was scaring myself into a panic, and ended by asking me who it was that I thought was warning us. If it was not Kaspar——

"I don't know," I said. "I can't say. If I could——"

"But who can it be?" he persisted. He was an obstinate fellow and had an annoying trick of harping on a point once he had got hold of it. "Who can it be?"

"Well, possibly, the Prussian police."

"My dear fellow! Absurd! Perfectly absurd! Why should they?"

"Well, they may wish to avoid trouble and yet be unwilling to oppose their French masters. There may be orders out to seize us, and for their own reasons—we cannot suppose that they love the French—they may not wish the orders to be executed."

However, he would not hear of this. It was too far-fetched, it was fanciful. I was letting my fears run away with me. He laughed at the notion and presently turning his back on me, after a groan or two at the shortness of the bed, he went to sleep. I would fain have done the same but my brain was at work, and I could not sleep so easily. The problem obsessed me. I had an uneasy feeling that a net was closing about us, and I lay so long turning it this way and that, that in the end I overslept myself, and Perceval had dressed and gone down when I opened my eyes.

I followed him as quickly as I could. I was still in two minds about the matter, but was convinced that it would be useless to argue with him. There were only three or four persons in the common room when I entered,

but they were three or four too many, for they were smoking and spitting, and the stale smell of beer pervaded the place. Ellis was at the table by the window, and I saw at once that something more had occurred to disturb him.

"What is it?" I murmured, as I cast an eye through the latticed window at the roadway, which was on a higher level than the floor of the room, and disclosed the passers-by only up to the waist.

"I have had another of those confounded papers!" he replied. "It was in my napkin—as before." He pushed the thing across to me under cover of a plate. I looked at it. The paper, the writing, the words, all were the same.

"Umph!" I said, and shrugged my shoulders. "Pleasant!"

"What's to be done?"

He was evidently shaken, and I made up my mind. "I should take the advice and go by Wittenberg," I said.

He looked sadly out of temper, but he did not answer at once. A minute later, seeing Kaspar standing in the doorway he beckoned to him. "Send Herr Klatz to me," he said. And when the little man, his gills rosy, his eyes twinkling with good-humour, appeared, "Klatz," he said, "Mr. Cartwright wishes to see Wittenberg."

"The home of Dr. Martinus," I said, playing up to him with a smile. "It is possible, I suppose? It is not much out of our way?"

The little man's hands went up in piteous remonstrance. "*Unmöglich*!" he exclaimed. "Impossible, Excellency! Impossible! It is many hours out of the way—a long day and no nearer Berlin when we are there! And," glancing warily behind him to make sure that he had no listeners, "it is the road to Magdeburg, and on that road there are French troops. The road of the Elbe, you understand, Excellency! Oh, it would not do at all! I could not reconcile it with my conscience to take His Excellency that way. When peace comes," looking benevolently at me, "Mr. Cartwright may visit it. It is of interest, oh, colossal! But at present, no."

" How far should we have to follow the Elbe road ? " Ellis inquired.

" A long way, and there are French garrisons in Magdeburg on the one side and in Torgau on the other. Oh, it would not do at all, Excellency."

" But there may be French troops in the Elster direction also ? " I suggested.

" Going—whither, sir ? "

" Oh, to Berlin, say."

He cast a compassionate glance at me. " But the French have withdrawn from Berlin. His Excellency knows that. For Custine, Glogau, Dantzig—they would not go this way."

" Just so," said Ellis, nodding. " Well, that will do for the present, Klatz. You can go."

" At what hour will His Excellency be ready ? "

" At eight. But be within call in the meantime."

When he was gone, " H'm," said Perceval, " that settles it, I think ? What he says sounds reasonable."

" I'm hanged if I know," I replied, though the man's arguments had seemed fair enough.

He raised his eyebrows. " You are hard to persuade," he said.

I was, and for an odd reason, though I did not think it worth while to advance it. It rested on Klatz. While he had stood talking to us, I had become aware of a contradiction in him. He was a man peculiarly fitted to go anywhere without arousing suspicion ; a cheery, innocent, roundabout little chap, mild as milk, and in a word as much like a German cherub as it is possible to imagine. Yet I knew that the inner Klatz must be something quite different, or he would not have been capable of risking his life, coolly and imperturbably, as we knew that he had risked it over and over again in his perilous journeys across the country. Clearly then there were two Klatzs, and the inner one, the real man, might, it occurred to me, be as clever at deceiving us as at deceiving those among whom he moved unsuspected.

I was so strongly impressed by the discrepancy that I presently burned my boats. " Look here, Ellis," I said, rising, and speaking, I have no doubt with some heat,

" be guided by me—for once ! Make up your mind, and go by Wittenberg ! Go by Wittenberg, no matter what Klatz says."

He stared at me. " Why, my dear man, what's taken you ? " he exclaimed. " This is not like you."

" I don't know, but I beg you to do as I say. I am sure that we shall be wise to do so. If it is only to oblige me, Ellis, go that way. Give Klatz any reason you like."

" I can't make you out," he said. " You believe this—this rubbish, then ? " flicking with his finger the paper which lay beside him under cover of a plate. " You think it is genuine ? A warning ? Yet you were not used to be nervous, Cartwright ? "

" Well, I am nervous now," I answered, " and I don't mind confessing it. I may be a fool, but if it is only to oblige me, Ellis, don't go by the Elster."

He sat, drumming with his fingers on the table ; and I could see that he was more than a little put out. But at length—" Well, if you put it that way," he said, " of course, I'll give way. We'll go by Wittenberg. But I tell you frankly that I think we are doing a foolish thing. I think, more likely than not, that we are running the very risk you wish to avoid. We've many reasons for trusting Klatz and no reason to trust your unknown advisers—that is clear. Still, I'll do it, as you feel so strongly about it. Only I warn you, you must stand the blame if anything happens."

" I will," I said stoutly, though my heart misgave me. " Whatever comes of it I will be responsible."

He shrugged his shoulders, and went out, his face grim. What he said to Klatz, or what reason he gave for the change, I don't know. But I will say that for Perceval, he had a way with him. He could ride the high horse when he chose, and play the Envoy ; and though when he returned he was in no good temper, and made no attempt to hide it, he said nothing more to me. Klatz, too, when I next came upon him, superintending the packing of the carriage in the street before the inn, said no word, and soon after eight we got away on the Wittenberg road.

CHAPTER III

At Wittenberg

It was another dull oppressive morning, and before we had driven a German mile from Grossenhayn we encountered two things which did not lighten my responsibility; a responsibility that weighed on me the more heavily, as I had assumed it on the strength of an idea at best fanciful. The first thing was a travel-stained calash which we overtook and passed on the outskirts of the town. It was as dingy and ramshackle as the ruck of German post-carriages, and contained two persons, an over-dressed woman, coarsely handsome, and a lad, half-man, half-boy, with a big head, for whom, brief as my view of him was, I took a strange distaste. But that which gave to this carriage an air of ill omen was the fact that it was conducted by the postilion in the French uniform whom I had remarked in the inn-yard.

Then, a little later, we came up with a party of French infantry, small dark men, not particularly soldierly to the eye, but marching, in their baggy red trousers, with that ugly lounging gait which looks slow yet carries the men over more ground than any other troops can cover in the time. The road, where we came up with them, was narrow, with a ditch on either side, and the officer riding at the rear waved to us to keep back. The result was that for half a league we crawled along in their dust until a welcome cross-road enabled us to pass them. The men eyed us inquisitively—no doubt our two carriages travelling together attracted attention that we could well have spared; and for a moment I feared that the officer was going to stop us. However, he only addressed a question which we could not hear to the leading postboy and, content with the answer, suffered us to proceed.

Still it was not a heartening episode, nor did it stand alone. Though we had now passed out of the immediate sphere of war, these were not the only troops we encountered. We came on bodies of Dutch and Danes,

marching northwards—probably they had been ordered down to curb the Brunswick rising; and later on some straggling, black-avised Italians proceeding God knows whither, who whatever they were to their enemies were certainly a terror to the countryside. They gave us, these broken wandering fragments, a singular impression of the vastness of the machine which the great despot wielded, and of the world-wide scope of the resources on which his power drew.

And French, Dutch, Danes, or Italians, they all marched and swaggered as if the land belonged to them; eyeing the *bauern* insolently, plundering the shops, flinging coarse jeers at the women at work in the fields. And the peasants, standing at the street corners or plodding in the dust of their marches, eyed them askance and with fear, cringed before their coming, crossed their path on sufferance. The very sky, low and dark, seemed to look down on a beaten land, upon crops raised for the profit of others, upon villages crushed under imposts, upon towns ruled by servile burgomasters. Hardly could I believe that a single day of battle had had power so to enslave a nation. That fatal 14th of October, the day of Jena and Auerstadt, had indeed done its work!

I could not refrain from putting my sense of this into words. "That poor wretch of a Schill!" I exclaimed, "He must have been mad to think that he would be supported!"

"A beaten people!" said Ellis, his eyes averted.

"A very easily beaten people! Why, the Spaniards are worth two of them! They at least are making a fight of it. No wonder that the Emperor does not know where to stop in his exactions. Or that the King hesitates to return to Berlin."

"The King does not set them much of an example," Ellis agreed drily.

"A d—d bad example," I rejoined. "Not much of the Great Frederick about him—except the selfishness of his policy. For the sake of filching Hanover from us, his allies, he threw over Austria. Then when he saw that he was not to be allowed to keep his plunder he threw over the French, and is paying for it! But after all,

Ellis, it is something to have seen this. Our journey won't be entirely wasted."

He hummed and hawed, and I have no doubt that he was already considering the terms of the report that he would send in. After a pause, "Yes," he admitted, grudgingly, "but we might have known this without seeing it. Had there been a spark of spirit left in Prussia, she must have joined Austria this year, and turned the scale. But she is beaten. Yes, and there's a pretty deep mark of Davout's hoof here. He has put his foot down and crushed them body and soul, my good man."

Davout, it will be remembered, was at this time in charge of North Germany. The French garrisons in all Prussia's strong places were under his command, while as Chief of the Military Police of the Empire, he gripped the strings of every intrigue, and overlooked every conspiracy. His was indeed the hand that lay heavy on the nation!

I have set down this conversation not only because it reflects pretty faithfully our impressions at the time, but because, I must own, it was nearly all that passed between us during a long day's journey. Perceval was morose and taciturn, and I resented his attitude. At Cosdorf we had to wait a long hour for horses, the carriages surrounded by all the scum and riff-raff of the road, whose scowling curiosity kept us continually on tenter-hooks. At Jessen we got relays, but owing to the earlier delay had no time to eat—or Klatz said we had not—if we would be certain of reaching Wittenberg before the gates closed. The heat was stifling, the flies tormented us, and what with one thing and another we were like two cross dogs coupled up and apt to snarl on the least provocation. I could see that Perceval felt that none of these things would have befallen us had we kept to the direct road; while I resented his attitude, I asked myself sorely how he would have behaved if he had been the superseded one, and in my irritation—God forgive me—dubbed him an insufferable, selfish, pedantic prig!

Then it did not help us that, as the day wore on, it grew hotter. Dark clouds massed themselves in the western sky until in that quarter the whole heavens were black with tempest. The light faded, the plain, rolling

monotonously away in flat undulations, took on a livid look, and as we approached Wittenberg the thunder began to rumble in the distance.

The postboys, glancing over their shoulders, flogged on their sweating horses, the carriage bounded and jolted from one hole to another, the gloom increased. Presently the gates appeared before us, showing grey and phantom-like in the strange light, with a single stork seated with drooping wings on its nest above them. The thunder crashed nearer and louder. We drew up at the barrier.

"I wish to God we were well through it," Ellis muttered, as Klatz, descending from the calash, advanced with our papers.

However, things went better than we feared. The guard had no more mind to be out in the storm than we had. They cast but a perfunctory glance at the papers, counted us, asked whence we had come that day, and waving to us to proceed, dived back into shelter.

We drove under the echoing gateway, rolled through narrow streets, between bald houses that stared cold and ghastly in the pale light, bumped over the pavement, and turning under an arch, halted with much cracking of whips in the courtyard of the Golden Stag.

The inn stood on three sides of the court, and round the court ran a gallery. The gloom of the storm darkened the small open space, but three or four candle-lit windows shone out on the twilight, and there issued from the same windows a medley of voices and laughter.

Beneath the gallery beside which we had pulled up, three or four waiters were bustling about, huddling chairs and tables under cover, and mingled with these a bevy of men—in gaudy uniforms and tipsily noisy—stood holding bottles and glasses, as if they had just been displaced from the tables. Through the windows behind, we had a glimpse of a long table and of a large party seated at it.

We had time to see this, and with misgiving that the diners were French: then a stout figure detached itself from the group and came towards us. Before the man reached the carriage door, Klatz—the ever nimble Klatz—skipped out and intercepted him.

The colloquy lasted longer than we expected, while the thunder pealed overhead and at any moment the storm might burst—large drops were already pattering on the ground. Ellis thrust out his head. "Well!" he cried impatiently, "What is it, Klatz? What is the matter?"

A sad, fat man, the innkeeper, advanced, bowing, to the door of the carriage. "I am desolated, *Hofgraflichen*," he said, "but what can I do? My house is taken up. A party of officers from Magdeburg are celebrating here. They have engaged——"

"Not the whole house!" Ellis exclaimed. "Nonsense, man, you can take us in somewhere. We are not going out into this storm."

The sad, fat man raised his hands in deprecation. "I could give you rooms to sleep—it is possible. But to eat, no, Herren. The Speise Saal is taken up and all the first floor. You see?"

"Then we will eat in our rooms!"

"So! But I have no servants; it is not practical. I have not the men. But if the *Hofgraflichen* are willing to eat out——"

"Man, we will eat out," Ellis rejoined. "Only let us escape from the rain before we are drenched. Come, Klatz, we will see the rooms."

But I had had my eyes on the topers about the doorway. I had noticed that they were observing us, and I touched Perceval's elbow. "I am not sure," I muttered, "that it would not be wiser to go on and find another inn."

"In this storm? No, Cartwright, no, I am hanged if I do! You have brought us here, very much against my will," querulously. "And now that we are here——"

"Very good," I said. "I am content if you are." But it did not escape me that the innkeeper when he led Ellis and Klatz into the house avoided the door round which the Frenchmen clustered and took them in by another on the opposite side of the court. The choice told a tale.

I thought it well to be as prudent, and I also took shelter under the gallery on that side. Kaspar followed suit, stationing himself a few paces from me. The rain was beginning to pour down, leaping from the ground in

a million points of silver, and the postboys, cowering in their saddles and cursing the delay, waited impatiently for a signal. Presently it came from a window above, and hastened by a blinding flash of lightning, they drew on to the stables through an arch at the end of the yard.

This left me once more in full view of the Frenchmen, but I averted my gaze from them and directed my eyes along the sheltered space on my side. Here things were rougher and wore a more domestic aspect. Across a corner linen hung on a cord to dry, and against the wall a couple of spinning wheels stood flattened : a saddle rested athwart an empty dog kennel, and beside it some children's toys lay, mingled with pattens and milk pails.

These things taken in, my eyes passed on to two persons, who, seated on a bench under the gallery, appeared to be either alarmed by the tempest—they were holding one another's hands—or ill at ease for a different reason. One was an elderly woman, neat and apple-faced, in the garb of an upper servant : the other a young girl, plainly dressed, and apparently of superior position, for her luxuriant hair, parted on the forehead, was piled up in the curling, *negligée* mode of the day.

Their eyes, I noticed, roved nervously about them, and between the storm and the noise of the revellers opposite us, the two looked thoroughly out of place as well as uncomfortable.

Nothing to remark in this : just two travellers, unversed in the road, and astray amid strange surroundings. But the girl's face attracted me : it caught, it held my eyes. It was an oval face, pure and delicate, and somewhat pale, a face that gained in expression what it lost in colour. The eyes, bright and quick, told of secret disquiet, while the mouth, finely curved, quivered from time to time, as if tears were not far off.

" What are they doing here ? " I wondered. " And what is their trouble ? " Before I had time to conceive an answer I found the innkeeper at my elbow. He began, with a stealthy eye on the Frenchmen, to renew his apologies, but seeing the direction of my gaze he broke off.

" What are those two doing here ? " I asked.

" Ah, there again I am unfortunate ! " he said. " Their

room is not ready, and the young lady is of the suite of the Grand Duchess of Zerbst, and commended to my humble services by Her Highness. She is here to find a partner to share a *landschute* to Berlin—on her way to Altona. But what will you? The times are bad. A share in a *landschute* to Berlin—nothing more easy two or three years ago. But few women travel nowadays—safer at home, *mein Herr*—and I cannot hear of one. The young lady is pressed for time, and I fear will be forced to travel by the *Eilwagen*, which is slow, and—little fitting."

"She has the look of an '*Engländerin*?'" I suggested.

"No, *gnädiger Herr*, she is Danish. There are no English here: how should there be? Though, craving your pardon," with a sly glance at me, "I had the same thought of you until you spoke. You are doubtless from the south?"

"From Moravia," I answered carelessly, "but now of Hamburg. The old lady does not accompany her?"

"No, she returns. They came in at mid-day. I shall do my best—to oblige Her Highness I would do my possible. But—" with open hands he expressed his plight—a very sad, fat man with no love of the French.

"I am sorry that we have no lady with us. Otherwise I am sure——"

"The high-born is gracious. But it would not be—practical."

Still the girl's face appealed to me. She looked forlorn. "It is a long way to Altona," I said.

"As to Hamburg. But from Berlin she is better-than-well arranged for."

He might have said more, but Ellis came down. He had donned his fur cloak, and was fretting and fuming, for he liked going out to supper no better than I did. I pointed the two out to him, and stated the case. "I suppose we could not take her on with us?" I ventured.

He stared at me. "Good heavens, man," he cried testily, "what room have we? And a young girl? Ridiculous! We have enough to do to get ourselves through this cursed country without taking charge of all the distressed damsels we meet. Come, tell Kaspar to

get you your cloak. Klatz recommends the Rathskeller. Come, I am famished, man."

I saw that my suggestion had heated a temper already simmering, and I said no more. Kaspar brought me my cloak, and not sorry to put a space between ourselves and the Frenchmen, we passed into the town. Since we had entered the inn it had grown dark, but now and again the lightning whitened the house fronts, and its glare enabled us to avoid the abandoned carts, the piles of fire-wood and the projecting cellar-doors that in Germany make every street a peril.

Fortunately the Market Place was not far off, and a walk of three minutes brought us to the low door and the half-dozen steps that led down to the cheerful, well-lighted Rathskeller. It was of the usual pattern, a narrow vaulted chamber with white-washed walls, divided into six or seven bays, and set with two tables in each bay, one on either side of the middle passage. In a homely way the aspect of the place was bright and cheerful.

Probably the storm had kept away many of the habitués, for there were not more than a dozen persons present. Two-thirds of these were smoking and drinking beer from earthenware mugs; the other third were supping, plainly but sufficiently. It was not my first nor my twentieth visit to such a place, and we were soon, our orders given, seated comfortably in one of the empty bays.

Even Ellis's ill-humour was not proof against the pleasant change from the gloom and rain of the streets. "Well, we shall not do so badly," he said, looking about him and stretching his long legs.

But he turned glum a moment later. A clatter of iron-shod feet arose at the entrance, and five wild-looking youths, long-haired and bare-necked, in loose, strangely-cut coats, trooped in and, talking loudly and raucously, marched down the passage, as if the place belonged to them. Unfortunately they chose the table over against ours, flung their staves and knapsacks into a corner, dragged up the benches, and hammering arrogantly on the table began to bawl their orders.

"Oh, d—n it," said Perceval, eyeing them askance; "this spoils all."

"Students," I said. "From Leipzig or Halle. They must lord it over everyone, or they would not be German *Burschen*. They will quiet down presently."

To some extent they did, but not until they had taken seisin of the place, looked everyone over, and hidden themselves in a cloud of smoke. I would rather have been without them, for they were a noisy, obstreperous crew, and their tobacco was vile. But our supper came and we applied ourselves to it, and presently their meal also arrived, accompanied by stupendous flagons of beer, and took off their attention.

They were uproarious still, bursting now and again into a chorus which they timed to blows on the table; and occasionally they flung a jest or a derisive word at some distant and inoffensive person. But they did not make us their butts, and though we could not ignore their presence, we were becoming hardened to the nuisance, when without warning they broke into a volley of booing and hooting. "Out! out! out!" they roared.

I looked up, to learn the cause of the outburst, and saw that they were all facing towards the entrance. I glanced that way, but too late to see more than that others nearer the door were also gazing towards it. "What was it?" I asked Ellis. "I missed it."

"A man in a French uniform I only just saw him. He looked in, but thought better of it. One of those army postilions, I fancy."

"Oh!" said I, remembering the man whom I had seen twice at Grossenhayn.

"But—" Perceval asked, "why did they set on him?"

"Because he was French, I suppose."

"But I wonder they are not afraid."

"Well, just so. To be sure, it is odd." And then after a moment's thought, "Do you know, I think, if you don't mind, I'll look into this? I may learn something. There may be more in it than appears."

He put his hand on my arm to detain me, but I was on my feet, and when he called after me I was already half way across the passage, my mug in my hand. "Smollis et fiducit," I said, using the old cant words; and as the five wild-looking figures gazed at me in amazement at

my audacity, I raised my mug. "Brother Burschen, I drink to the Burschenschaft!" I said. "The Past to the Present!"

For a moment they studied me, scowling; then satisfied, I suppose, with what they saw, they sprang to their feet. "Fiducit!" they answered, as one man. "We drink to the Burschenschaft! The Present to the Past!"

"The Blue of the sky, the Red of the grape, and the White of the Mädchen's breast," I continued, reading the question in their eye.

"So! Of Heidelberg."

"And you, brother Burschen?"

"Of Leipzig."

I laid my hand on the back of the bench. "Were the President to say, 'Ad loca——'"

"Welcome and honoured!" rejoined the senior, making room for me. As I sat down I caught a glimpse through the haze that surrounded us of Ellis's disapproving face, but I did not heed his annoyance. I knew better than he where I was, and I was set on following out the idea that had occurred to me. Success might be worth some risk.

"I am from the South," I said, opening my trenches. "And have lived so long in the land of Philistia that I am no better than a freshman. Much is strange to me though I was once in good standing. That chap who looked in just now——"

"We sup with no Frenchmen," the senior replied. "The Bursch is free." Then, with his eyes fixed on me and some doubt in them, "Placetne?"

"Valde et maxime placet!"

He nodded. "We blow the fire. Palm kindled it, Schill fed it, the Burschen are the bellows."

"But is it not extinguished?" He had lowered his voice, and I followed the example.

"At the top. Ay, patted down, beaten down, smothered down—at the top!" He spat on the floor. "But at the bottom it burns and the Burschen blow it. And presently it will burst forth, the more furiously because it is smothered down! And then the top——"

"Yes?"

"The top will fall in," dryly.

"But Prussia? With your leave, it does not seem to me that here there is much fire burning?"

He snapped his fingers. "Out of a dead Prussia, a living Germany! The Fatherland!" He raised his mug and as at a signal all five—after the students' free and easy custom in public places—burst into a well-known song:

"Which is the German's Fatherland?
Is't Prussian land, is't Swabian land?
Is't where on Rhine the red grapes hang,
Where o'er the Baltic sea mews clang?
Oh no, oh no, oh no, oh no,
This Fatherland must wider go.

"Which is the German's Fatherland?
Then, name me finally that land!
Wide as the German free tongue springs,
And hymns to God in Heaven sings!
That shall it be! That shall it be!
That land, brave German, 's given to thee!"

Long before the chorus reached its close, three-fourths of those present were on their feet, joining lustily in it. And marking their sparkling eyes, and the abandon with which they thundered the chorus:

"Das soll es seyn, das soll es seyn,
Das wacherer Deutschen, nenne dein!"

I was convinced that my neighbour had made no vain boast when he said that the Burschen were blowing the fire. Indeed, I caught the infection and joined in, regardless of Perceval's black looks and angry signals, which the cloud of smoke mercifully obscured for me. After the song, "Das Vaterland!" cried the students, waving their mugs. "Deutschen, das Vaterland!"

The toast drunk, we sat down. "Yet Schill," I remarked, anxious to probe the matter still further, "the brave and unfortunate Schill——"

The last thing I meant was to cause a fresh outbreak, but I did it. In a twinkling the Burschen were on their feet again. "Vivat Schill!" they shouted. "Hoch to Schill! Hoch! hoch!"

But this time they were but feebly supported. Here

and there a man raised his glass. For the majority the challenge was too audacious. They stared stolidly into the smoke, or glanced uneasily towards the door.

I was a little uncomfortable myself. The thing had gone further than I had anticipated, and I could not be unconscious of Ellis's glances. I could make a pretty good guess at his thoughts, and owned that he had some reason. All the same I could not refrain from one last attempt to get to the bottom of things. "But do you not run a risk? I speak as a Philistine. There are French in the town—a large party of them at the Golden Stag."

"So! They will not be there long!" they bragged. "And they will not interfere with us. Are we not the Burschenschaft? And behind us is there not the *Tugendbund*? Touch Leipzig and you prick Halle, Gottingen, Heidelberg, Fichtelstadt! The whole German land! No, the Bursch is free, and woe to those who would enslave him."

"But——"

I got no further. A hand fell on my shoulder. Ellis, unable to control his feelings any longer, had risen and stepped across the passage. "For God's sake put an end to this fooling!" he muttered, his voice trembling with anger. "Have you forgotten yourself altogether? Do you want us to be arrested? You are going the right way, man, if you do, and in our position—with our responsibility! Are you mad?"

"I am coming," I said. But—but one moment, Chief. Just a moment more. One moment! I want——"

"No, by G—d, I'm off!" he retorted. "I wash my hands of it!" And he turned on his heel, snatched up his hat, and stalked away to the door, his tall figure and magnificent fur cloak drawing all eyes upon him as he strode down the passage.

I was vexed with myself as well as with him, for I knew that I had been imprudent. But the harm was done, and after being so frankly received, I could not break away without a word of acknowledgment. "I regret, good brothers, but I must leave you now," I said. "I thank you for——"

I paused, seeing that all five were looking oddly at me.

The spokesman raised his eyebrows. "So? English?" he said in a low tone.

It was no use to deny it. Perceval, speaking in English, had given the secret away. I nodded.

"Ah! Then it is for you, the risk! If we had known—— But there's no one here that will speak. You are safe enough. But be careful, friend. If there is anything we of the Burschen can do——"

"We go by the Elbe at five—to Magdeburg," put in the next to him. They wore a different air now, spoke low, and with heads together, looked warily over their shoulders—for my sake I knew.

I thanked them again. "But I am not in the danger you think," I said, and I explained, for I saw that they took me for a spy. "Still you are right. I must be careful, and go now—my friend will be waiting for me."

I paid and fled, as much noticed, I dare say, in my going, as Ellis had been before me. I seemed to have been in the place a long time, but I did not think that the time had been wasted—if no ill came of it.

When I stepped out into the Market Place I found that the storm had passed. The downpour had ceased, leaving the kennels running and the wet pavement gleaming. Above, the moon was shining in a clear rain-swept sky. As I crossed the open space I was in some doubt which of two streets that opened before me was the one that led to the inn, but luckily, as I paused, a watchman with his lighted lantern and iron-shod staff came round a corner and, lifting his voice, announced to the row of peaks and gables that fringed the square that it was eleven of the clock and all well! He directed me and two minutes later I was hammering on the closed door.

I asked the man who admitted me if the other gentleman had come in. He did not seem to understand, and "Has any one entered within the last five minutes?" I asked.

"No one," he answered. "Nor for another five."

He was sleepy and surly, and I fancied that there was some mistake, so I entered. As I crossed the angle of the courtyard, which was half in moonlight, half in shadow, I saw that the illumination in the Speise Saal was much lessened, though a few topers still lingered round

the guttering candles. Taking my own light, I mounted the stairs, considering as I climbed how I should put the case to Ellis, for I could not hide from myself that I had jumped the ropes.

To meddle in the conspiracies of a country to which one is accredited—or through which one passes, cloaked in the privileges of an ambassador—is against the rules of the service, and only to be forgiven when success crowns the venture. But to do so when one is in a subordinate capacity and without authority—well I felt that I should need all my finesse to placate Perceval. Yet I had learned something, and, much or little, it would inure to his credit.

By the time, candle in hand, I had threaded my way through the passages to his door, I thought that I had the matter arranged in my mind—after all he was a sensible chap at bottom, and would see reason. I knocked. When he did not answer, I opened the door. It would not do to appear diffident or guilty.

But, to my surprise, he was not there, and I began to think that he had not entered, and that the man at the door was right. I passed on to my own room, and in a chair outside the door I found Kaspar sleeping sweetly. I roused him. "Where is His Excellency?"

"I have not seen him," Kaspar replied, standing up and blinking his eyes. "Isn't he with you, sir?"

"No. Are you sure he hasn't come in?"

"Not to my knowledge, sir."

"Where is Herr Klatz?"

"I don't think that he is in either, but I will see."

He went and returned. "He is not in his room."

"Ah!" I rejoined. "Well, never mind him, but go downstairs and inquire if His Excellency has been seen. Make sure that he is not in the house, do you hear? He should have returned before this."

Kaspar hurried away on his errand. I snuffed my candle and stood, thinking. The house was very quiet, and after waiting awhile, I went back to the head of the stairs and listened. I began to feel uneasy.

CHAPTER IV

His Excellency Returns

I SUPPOSE that I had made some noise, stalking to and fro, for as I stood staring down the dark silent well of the staircase and listening, a door three or four paces from me opened and a head appeared.

For a moment the light of the candle I held glinted on a pair of bright eyes, an anxious little face, a thick tail of dark hair athwart a peignoired shoulder, and I recognized the girl whom I had seen under the gallery. Then the face was hurriedly withdrawn, the door fell to softly, I was alone. I heard Kaspar set his foot on the stairs. He came up them noisily, two at a time.

"His Excellency has not come in," he said.

"Are you sure?"

"Quite sure, sir." And I saw that in his phlegmatic way he shared my alarm.

"Then we had better go at once and see what has become of him. Come along, man. Don't stop to get your hat."

We hurried down the stairs. The courtyard was in darkness, the last light in the Speise Saal had been extinguished. The man at the entrance confirmed what Kaspar had said and, his curiosity aroused, stepped out with us into the street. The little town lay quiet about us.

The moonlight fell along the street in which we stood, but it helped us little, for it was broken into patches by the signs that projected from the houses, while here and there an outside staircase blocked the view. It was difficult to see to any distance, but we listened. "I think you had better go one way and I another," I said to Kaspar. "Don't lose yourself. I'll go towards——"

The porter cut me short. He held up his hand. "So!" he exclaimed, "I think he comes."

I was relieved, for it was beginning to weigh on me that it was I who had brought Ellis to Wittenberg. "He must have taken a wrong turning," I said, as, fifty or sixty

yards away, the man whose footsteps the porter had heard, entered the street from a side lane, and emerging from a mass of shadow approached us.

"It's Klatz," cried Kaspar.

"Klatz?" I ejaculated.

It was Klatz. He came up out of breath with the haste he had made. He recognized Kaspar, who was bare-headed, almost as quickly as we recognized him. "What is it?" he asked. "Is anything the matter?"

"His Excellency has not come in," I replied. "We had better all separate and go different ways to——"

"So!" said the porter again—he had sharp ears, that man! "He comes now."

I doubted. A clatter of feet, a murmur of loud voices had, indeed, broken into the street, from the direction of the Market Place, but I had little hope that Perceval was one of the group, for the party, an uproarious one, was shouting a song without the least regard for the sleep of the townsfolk. "No," I said, "it's not he. I fancy it's some students that I——"

"I think he is with them," said Klatz.

"Oh, but, man——"

"I think so, sir," Kaspar agreed "I see His Excellency now."

And certainly there were six in the party, and the students were but five. But I could hardly believe that the sixth was Perceval. The song they were singing, and singing with derisive gusto, and much brandishing of iron-shod sticks,

> "Ah, he who slyly the Mädchen seeks,
> What risks he runs, when the little god tweaks!
> By pending pole and the distaff's stroke
> His fire is quenched and his pate is broke!
> O fie, O fie, O fie, O fie!
> Whither away, sir, on the sly?"

was certainly not one of his choosing, and as certainly accorded ill with his dignity. Indeed the porter sniggered. "It's him," he said. "Well, he's not the first."

And it was Ellis. A dozen paces from us, he detached himself from his companions while they, with an elaborate

salutation and a mockery of respect, marched solemnly by, still singing, with uplifted sticks :

> " O fie, O fie, O fie, O fie !
> Whither away, sir, on the sly ? "

" Good heavens, Chief," I cried in amazement. " Where in the world have you——"

" Come in," he growled, and it needed no more to prove to me that he was in a red hot rage. But not another word would he utter until we had entered the inn and climbed the stairs and he had slammed the door of his room upon us.

Then as he turned on me, his candle in his hand, I saw that his stock was torn, his hat wet and mudstained as if it had been in the gutter, and his face discoloured. But he gave me no time to ask questions or voice my concern. Pale with passion, " What the devil did you mean," he snarled, " by leaving me as you did ? "

" I ? But it was you, my dear Ellis, who——"

" I've been next door to murdered ! And might have been murdered, but for those young ruffians—insolent brutes ! " He took out his handkerchief and passed it over his lips, and I saw that he was really unable to continue. I stepped to the table, found his flask, and poured out some cognac. He took it without thanking me, drank it, and sat down on his bed. A little colour came back to his face.

" Now tell me what happened," I said. " If it happened through fault of mine, Ellis, I much regret it."

" Regret it ? " he ejaculated. The cordial had heated his indignation, already at the boiling point " Regret it ? And happened ? I'll tell you what happened. I took the wrong road out of the Market Place. I was quick to see what I had done and I was turning about when a lad overtook me, asked me if I had lost my way and said he would show me a short cut to the inn. He led me down a side street till I grew suspicious. I saw we were in a kind of *cul de sac* with the town wall before us, and I stopped.

" ' I don't believe this is right,' I said, but before the words were out of my mouth I heard a movement, and

turned, and there was a man creeping up behind me. I don't know exactly what happened then, but I fancy I jumped for the wall. I was too late, the next moment the lad was on my back trying to pull me down, while the other sprang at me in front. I shouted and made what fight I could, but I was as good as choked, when those friends of yours came up, and the two let me go—and fled."

"Did they rob you?" I cried, in a panic. "They didn't get the——"

"No! But they tried. The tall man tore open my coat, but the clasp of the cloak was in his way, and they had not time. The others came up, d—n them!" with a fresh outburst of rage. "The brutes jeered at me, wanting to know what I was doing down there; it was a disreputable place, of course. And they would not listen when I told them, but began to sing that abominable song."

"Still they saved you from something more serious," I said, seeing with wonder that the correct Ellis was more disturbed by the students' insinuation than by the attempt to rob him. "And what they thought does not matter. The point is, was it just a *guet apens* by a couple of rogues who saw you astray, or a deliberate attempt by someone who knew what you had about you?"

"I hadn't it," dryly. "I'd hidden it, no matter where. But if you ask me I've no doubt that it was that they were after."

"Well, I'm afraid so."

"And what we were brought to Wittenberg for, thanks to you."

"Don't say that," I protested. "After all"—for I had been thinking—"it was Klatz who recommended us to go to the Rathskeller. And Klatz was out to-night, and came back out of breath two minutes before you."

"Klatz?"

"Yes, Klatz. Did you see either of the men's faces? Could you be sure that he was not——"

Ellis did not let me finish the sentence. He was on his feet, his temper quite lost. "By G—d, Cartwright, you are mad about Klatz!" he cried. "You've got Klatz on the brain! How could Klatz know that I should leave the Rathskeller alone? Or that I should

lose my way? How could he? Eh? But the truth is, instead of trying to inculpate Klatz, whom I trust, you ought to blame yourself. What business had you to go hobnobbing with those brutes of students? You in your position? Drinking toasts to Schill and singing seditious songs, and making yourself conspicuous? Why good G—d, man," with growing indignation, "you might have been arrested there and then, and I too! And what a position should we have been in! It was out of reason! It was indefensible! And I am bound to tell you, it is my duty to tell you, that if you don't know the rules of the service, by heaven, I must teach you them."

"Look here," I said, "Ellis," for I honestly thought that the villain of the play was Klatz and that my friend was wilfully blinding himself. "Suppose we talk this over in the morning when we are both a little cooler. You are upset now, and——"

"No," he retorted, too angry to be reasonable. "we'll have it out now, if you please. I gave way to you this morning and I see now what a mistake it was. The effect has been to expose me to this attack, and I might very well have lost my life, or the papers, which would have been worse! And all through your d—d folly about Klatz. But what I think a good deal more of is your conduct in joining those fools this evening, when I showed you plainly that I disapproved of it! What right have we to mix ourselves up with rubbish of that kind? Is it not against every tradition, every canon, every precedent of the service?

"As a rule," I admitted. "But every rule has its exceptions."

"Exceptions be d—d!" he said, shaken out of his usual propriety.

"Wait. Listen," I said, sobered by the reasonableness of his complaint, however unreasonably stated. "Let me tell you why I did it, for I did not do it without thought. I did it to learn something of the feeling of the country, of which they are as ignorant at home as of what is passing in the moon. It was to ascertain whether there did exist any of that discontent with the

Government which Stein at Troppau asserted and Gentz denied. Well, I did learn a good deal. I proved the existence of that discontent—I should have thought to your satisfaction. Granted that Burschen are privileged people; yet it is clear that even they would not dare to behave as they did, if they did not know that popular sentiment was with them. They could not drink Schill's health in public if Schill's conduct were disapproved, nor sing of German unity if Nap's rule were popular. No one opposed them, no one interfered. Very good. Then frankly I think I did you a service—and no small service. You have only to set down your impressions in official language and hand it in for Castlereagh's consideration and I'll warrant he'll send for you within twenty-four hours—and want to know more."

I had wrought myself up to a high pitch of indignation, for I thought Ellis unjust as well as stupid. But he brought me down with a jolt. "Well, I don't agree with you," he said, in his most official tone. "On the contrary, I think that your conduct was indiscreet in a high degree. Our business is not to mix ourselves up with this or that party. It is simply to get these despatches home in safety, and sallies like that of to-night are not only compromising but dangerous! Dangerous!"

"And you see no excuse?" I exclaimed.

"No! My good man, none! You talk about Klatz, but it is not Klatz who puts us in peril. It is your hot-headedness, Cartwright. It is your lack of the very elements of discretion! But for that I should not have left that place alone."

"Then that was my fault, too, I suppose?"

"Certainly. If you forgot yourself I could not be expected to stay and countenance it. And involve myself."

I really could not put up with that. It was most unfair. "Then I suppose you think," I retorted, "that you would be safer with Klatz than with me? That's it, is it?"

"Unless you show greater prudence, I do think so. If you are going to act as you acted this evening I haven't a doubt about it. You have told me that we are followed and watched and are in danger here and in danger there,

that the utmost circumspection is necessary! Very well. If that is so, if we are watched, and followed, you are condemned out of your own mouth. Could anything be more imprudent or more improper than your conduct this evening?"

I own that he had me there. It was difficult to meet that, and I lost my temper. "If that is so," I retorted, "if that is your opinion I had better make my way to Hamburg by one road, and you by another."

Probably he did not think me in earnest, for "That is for you to decide," he said in his coldest tone. "Certainly I do not need your services *en voyage*. There is no quill work." Which was an additional stab, for quill work is the depreciatory term applied to the tyro's employment. "And if we are likely to have any repetition of to-day's folly——"

"You think you would be safer without me?"

"I neither say it nor deny it." He shrugged his shoulders. He had grown cool in proportion as I had become heated.

Too heated for prudence, or, alas, for common sense, either of which would have told me that I was on the point of making a fool of myself. "Very good," I answered. "Then I shall take you at your word." And, *acharné* to the last degree, I left the room, and slammed the door behind me.

It was a pretty quarrel, if it had ended there! And there it might have ended, for by morning I should have come to a cooler mind, if ill luck had not thrown Kaspar in my way at the very moment when a word could do most mischief. He was sitting in the passage, waiting to learn if Ellis wanted anything before he retired; and carried away by my feelings, I spoke to him—and burned my boats.

"His Excellency thinks it better that we should separate," I said, controlling with difficulty my voice, "and go by different routes. There is a boat starting down the Elbe at five and I shall go by it. You can take on my baggage. Call me at four."

He looked his amazement, but like a well trained servant he only asked if he could pack for me.

" No, I shall take little and I can manage that," I said. " Good night." And I shut myself up in my room.

Mea culpa! Mea maxima culpa! I own it humbly. But at the time I did not see this, or regret what I had done. The thing had no doubt been long coming to a head. A score of grievances, of pin-pricks and provocations, of patronage on one side, of resentment on the other, had made bad blood between us. And ten days of forced companionship within the narrow bounds of a travelling carriage with all the *désagréments* which this entailed had so inflamed the trouble that it hardly needed the irritation which our difference about Klatz had set up to ferment the sore and bring it to the surface.

Of course I see now how petty it all was and how childish I was—and blameable, heaven forgive me! But I did not see it then. I dubbed Ellis a pompous stiff-necked ass, and he no doubt thought me a hot-head, ill-trained and unbroken. I had done him, as I fancied, a valuable service—and been rewarded with rebuke! He saw in the same service only an unprofessional prank, compromising and dangerous.

So, as I have said, I did not at once repent. I was hot and excited. I thought myself in the right. I deemed myself hardly used. But before sleep, ill to woo, came to me, the thing began to appear in truer colours, and I to perceive that I had behaved like a fool.

For the quarrel might have serious consequences for me, even though we came together at Hamburg. I could hardly hope to have after this the good word of one who was now my chief and must report upon me, and though nothing that I knew of Perceval led me to believe that he would be unfair, so nothing that I knew of him led me to think that he would ignore our differences.

In all likelihood I should return branded with the worst *affiche* a man in our profession can earn, that of being indiscreet. With Europe closed to the service, three-fourths of our men were at this time idle, and I who had gone out to Vienna, the envy of men ten years older than myself, would return to spend my days in fruitless attendance at the Office, my only relaxation, as I haunted the waiting room, a daily perusal of the *Journal de Leyden*,

So I tossed and tumbled in a bed that, like all German beds, was too steep and too short for me; and I would gladly have undone what I had done. But I had spoken to Kaspar, and I had not the courage or the good sense to eat my words.

But let me say this. If I had known then what was destined to be the outcome, if I had foreseen ever so dimly the tragical issue which that night's work was preparing, if I had had an inkling of the life-long regret that I was laying up for myself, I know that I should have let no consideration of pride or dignity weigh with me. I should have abased myself without a murmur. But the future was hidden from me—and the price that was to be paid.

Still it was with a weight upon my spirits that I rose next morning and began to make my few preparations. The freshness of the morning, the July sun poured in through my casement, but had no immediate power to cheer me. I swallowed the cup of tea Kaspar had made for me, and presently, grumpily and sleepily, I descended the stairs.

I noted with some surprise that the door of the girl who had looked out last night stood open, and that the room was empty. But it was not until I emerged from the inn and stood in the rain-washed street where the *Stubenmädchen* were whitening the steps, and here and there a gilded vane glittered in the sunshine, that I felt the breath of adventure move me. Whatever the cost in the future, I was free in the present. Free for some days from the stuffy carriage and Ellis's company, free to make my way to Hamburg by any road I chose. The world was before me.

CHAPTER V

A Grand Ducal Court

I had one or two things to do before I left the town, and I was turning from the door of the Golden Stag when my eyes encountered a shabby calash, which was loading up a few paces from the entrance. The postboy, as dingy as the carriage, was already in the saddle and the two travellers were in their seats, and waiting only until one of them, the girl of the gallery, whose empty room was now explained, had said her last word to her escort of the day before.

It was clear that she had fallen on someone to share the expense of a *landschute*, and I glanced with curiosity at the person beside her, to see what manner of companion she had found. To my surprise I recognized the handsome over-dressed woman whom I had seen driving out of Grossenhayn behind the army postilion.

I had not liked her looks then. I did not like them now; and it crossed my mind to feel sorry for the girl. But the next moment the postboy cracked his ragged whip, the old lady stood back, crying "*Auf Wiedersehn!*" and the carriage jolted away in the direction of the Berlin Gate.

I started on my errands. I had put on my oldest clothes, but as I proposed to travel to Hamburg by water, and wished to attract as little notice as possible, I still doubted their fitness, and I made search for a clothier's shop. There I exchanged my coat and hat for a student's peaked cap and one of those ill-cut waistless coats beloved of Burschen.

I had omitted to shave, and by thrusting my stock into my pocket and throwing open my collar, I made myself into a passable imitation of a student. I bought an iron-shod stick on which to swing my satchel, and five minutes later I was on the quay, below the long wooden bridge. Here I had no difficulty in finding the craft of which the students had spoken to me.

I was late, but river life is leisurely, and the boat had not yet cast off. She was one of those heavy flat-bottomed craft, as much rafts as boats, that come down from the Bohemian highlands, and are broken up at Hamburg and sold to the shipyards for timber. As a rule their voyages are made in the spring, but that summer, as Napoleon found to his cost when the flood carried away his bridges at Donau, had been wet, and the Elbe was still high.

Making its voyage at this season the unwieldy vessel was crowded with passengers, and for a time I saw nothing of my five acquaintances. I was not sorry for this, for at the moment I had no taste for their company, though I thought that it might be useful when the time came to pass Magdeburg, now in French hands. For, though I had brought my passport, in the name of Wagenmacher, I had no mind to produce it, if it could be avoided.

The sun shone, a southerly wind raised a glittering ripple on the broad stream, and as I watched the towers and grey walls of Wittenberg—more beautiful without than within—receding behind us, I experienced an elation and a freedom to which I had been long a stranger. I was able to forget the equivocal position in which I had placed myself and its possible outcome; and lounging against the ropes that served for bulwarks, I fed my eyes on the sparkling water and the low green banks, or viewed with pleasure the queer costumes and snow-white caps of the peasants who surrounded me.

Somewhere, forward, three voices were singing a glee to the tinkling notes of a zither, and already the beer-boy was making his round. On all sides onion-scented meals were being produced from coloured handkerchiefs, everywhere smiles and contentment met the eye.

And this was Germany—Germany under the heel of Napoleon, the Germany which the Burschen had represented to be heaving with unhappiness and discontent! Inevitably I thought of Pope's lines on the small effect that governments or laws, conquerors or kings have on the happiness of nations.

Below Wittenberg the Elbe is no longer a picturesque river. Like the life of the tillers of the soil on its banks, it flows on, slow and placid. Not only has it left behind

it the rocks and rapids of the Saxon Switzerland, but even the valley in which it runs has here widened to a plain. Now and again islands part the stream, or low wooded hills rise gently from the level ; or pink and white hamlets peeping from the trees, with the gardens and towers of some lordly Schloss, break the foreshore.

At times we hardly seemed to move, so slow was our progress, at times the current caught us and urged us on. But I was in no hurry. I viewed with pleasure, I looked forward with contentment to days of inaction. If I thought at moments and with misgiving of Ellis's position and of Klatz—Klatz, whom I still stubbornly suspected—it was to comfort myself with the reflection that the rogue would be puzzled.

He might well think that our separation was a ruse, and conjecture that while my Chief pursued his journey with pomp, the despatches on which he had set his heart were in my care and fast receding in the distance.

The notion was cheering, and I found in it some warrant for the step I had taken. My departure might lessen Ellis's risk. On the other hand, though Perceval spoke German fluently, he had not that intimate knowledge of the country and the dialect which had recommended me, young as I was, for the Mission.

He could not pass as safely as I could for a native. But then, on his arrival in Berlin, he would doubtless report himself to the Danish Minister, and also to St. Marsan, the French resident ; and obtaining from the latter, or from the Prussian Foreign Office new credentials, he would regularize his position.

I felt no doubt that he would take that course. Nevertheless as the day wore on I drew less satisfaction from the thought. The heat increased as the sun rose overhead, and our progress, at two miles an hour, grew tedious. I found less to distract me, the novelty wore off, I yawned. At noon we tied up for an hour, which proved to be two, and I fell in with the students who—to cure a morning headache—had taken more beer than was good for them.

Three o'clock saw the deck cumbered with sleepers, the glee had become a brawling chorus, and it was but very, very slowly that we now progressed. All hope of

reaching Magdeburg that night was laid aside, and we had not even reached Dessau, when late in the evening the clumsy craft put into the left bank. We were ordered to go ashore and rejoin the boat at Dessau at five in the morning.

I had no mind to spend the night with the Burschen, and having waited in a quiet corner until I had seen them stream away with the crowd along the road to the town, I turned into the garden of a beer-house in the little village at which we had tied up. It was over-full, but I found a seat and ordered a simple meal. No one heeded the solitary student, and having eaten and paid, I took up my satchel and strolled away towards the town, which lies a few furlongs inland.

It was dusk but not dark, for the sky was clear and the plain open. I fancied the distance to be about a mile, and I had covered some third of this and was dwelling on the charms of a good bed, when I came to a place where the road forked, a narrow fir wood dividing the branches. I paused, but quickly made up my mind, and was taking the left hand track which seemed to lead more directly towards the lights of the town, when I heard voices in front—the raised voices of persons quarrelling.

As I went on, the voices grew louder, and presently two figures took shape in the darkness which the trees cast on the road. Apparently the quarrel had passed from words to blows, for the nearer figure was retreating before the other, and at the same time there came from it cries of remonstrance and alarm. I took the retiring party to be a woman—it was much the shorter—but it was so dark that I could not be sure even of that.

What passed next, passed in a few moments. The bleating cries rose to a shriek, a blow fell, and the woman —if it was a woman—either tripped backwards or was struck to the ground. The aggressor raised his weapon again, I caught a half-choked cry for mercy, and I sprang forward to intervene.

I hurled my satchel at the man, and followed it up, brandishing my iron-shod stick.

"Stand back!" I challenged. "Have a care, man! What is it?"

My sudden appearance or my cudgel took the rascal by surprise. He retreated three or four paces, leaving his victim lying in the road. "What is it to you?" he replied with an oath, but still backing before me as I advanced. "Go your way!"

"Not till I know more——"

I never finished the sentence, and I do not know what followed. For with that the thing for me came to an end. I remember, or I fancy I remember, a stunning shock, and I presume—I have no doubt rightly—that I was struck on the head from behind by the person I had essayed to protect. But even that is an inference drawn after the event.

At any rate there came for me a blank—darkness—silence.

And afterwards? Well, a slow struggling back to life through fevered wastes and dreadful parched places. But the pain-racked visions, the shadowy figures, the void always yawning for my reeling senses, that haunted my mind, and were I suppose so many stages in the return to consciousness, form no part of this story.

A day came when, though my memory of the past was hazy, I could think and speak, raise my head from the pillow and once more, as the nurses say, take notice. By that time the room in which I lay had become, owing to brief flashes of consciousness, fairly familiar to me.

The tall, curtained windows through which the sun peeped when the *veilleuse* was not glimmering in its basin, the old woman in the mob cap who flitted to and fro with a cup and a spoon, or at other times slumbered in a vast *chaise-longue*; the doctor in his powdered wig who stared at me, owl-like, his chin on the gold knob of his cane; even the dainty lady with golden hair, viewed at first as an angel, who at rare intervals smiled at me from the doorway—all these I had come to know, and to take for granted.

But on this particular morning I knew myself. I knew that the thin hands lying on the coverlet were mine, and the bearded chin, knew that I was Francis Cartwright of the F.O., and not only wondered how I came to be lying there, but had the desire to learn and the strength to ask.

Six weeks ! Had I really lain there six weeks ? Shaved ? Yes, I would like to be shaved. In His Highness's country-house, was I ? Really. But what Highness ? Oh, the Grand Duke of Zerbst. Very, very kind of him to take me in ! I murmured. I was still weak as water, and as I tried to express my gratitude the tears rose to my eyes.

" You're English, aren't you ? " the old lady asked in her turn.

I admitted it.

" You've talked—he—he ! And Her Highness heard of it. She is English, and she had you brought here from the servants' quarters. The gracious *Hoffürstliche* lady has been to see you most days. How did you come to be murdered ? Ach, the *allmächtiger Gott* may know, not I ! Some rogues of Burschen brought you in looking like death, and with your pockets turned out—*wunderbar* ! Everything taken, everything, everything ! The very linings stripped ! "

" I've seen you before," said I, pondering. " And the young lady there." I pointed to a portrait of a head which stood on an easel in such a position that, as I lay, my eyes rested on it—had rested on it indeed through many a feverish night. " You were with her. Who is she ? "

" He ! he ! That one ? " The old dame rubbed her nose with her horn-rimmed spectacles. " Well to be sure it is her room—when she is here."

" Oh ! And who is she, if you please ? "

" No great lady if you are thinking that, my man. Just," with a grin, " the Lady Babetta's governess. But of good—yes, of soldierly stock."

" English ? "

" *Nein, nein*. Danish is she—of Altona."

And that—that, strange to say, touched the chord of memory, and brought all back to me ; the girl waiting with her attendant in the courtyard of the Golden Stag at Wittenberg, the scene at the Rathhaus, the quarrel with Perceval Ellis, the voyage down the Elbe ; all the events of the days preceding my collapse, which hitherto had been wrapt in a mist that it had pained me to probe.

All this now came to mind—and I groaned. The parting,

which I had meant to be an affair of days, had grown into a matter of weeks. What must they be saying of me in England? What must they be thinking of me at the Office? And the alarm of my family, when they learned that Ellis had returned alone and for all explanation could give but the bare, the damning story of our parting and of my desertion.

After all, what could I do? Days, weeks perhaps, must elapse before I could muster strength to travel, and in the meantime to fret against fate, to consume myself with impatience, would not help. Too weak to contend, I let the thought of the future slip from me, and sinking into the easy ways of an invalid as into a feather bed, I put care and all but the present from me, looked forward to the next meal, and grumbled at the fat that floated on my *suppe*.

And they were infinitely kind to me—I say it with gratitude. The day came when I was carried out in a chair, and henceforth I spent much of my time on the Terrace, now watching the child princess as she careered up and down behind her hoop, her bouffant skirts billowing about her slim legs, now contemplating with amusement the lean stately figure of the Grand Duke as, cane and snuff-box in hand, he paced with dignity to and fro.

Often a page followed him, bearing a flute on a velvet cushion, and from time to time His Highness would halt, exchange in lofty fashion his cane for the flute, and resuming his progress pour forth to the September air some delicate trilling melody, some morceau of Lulli or Corelli.

I seemed to see in him the old slumberous Germany with its easy-going princelings and fat canons, its high-pitched roofs and chiming belfries, its Hofrath of this and Frei-Ritters of that—the Germany still almost mediaeval, into which like a dark thunderbolt of war the modern Napoleon had burst, hurling down all, devastating all, sweeping away all, even that shadowy and venerable Empire, which after some sort had bound all together. It was a contrast that was to be even more closely presented to me—but not yet.

And he was courteous, the Grand Duke, as he was quaint. No day passed that he did not approach my chair,

bid me with condescension to remain seated, inquire with affability but with real kindness, how I did. Doubtless in some degree I owed this to the fact that his wife had discovered in me an old acquaintance. Coming up to speak to me on my first appearance in the open, she had paused, gazed at me for a moment in smiling perplexity, then asked me if she had not seen me somewhere.

I had discovered this some days before, and had my answer ready. "Your Highness's recollection," I said, "is as flattering as it is accurate. I was for a short time *Chargé d'Affaires* at Berlin in my brother's absence."

She clapped her hands. "Mr. Cartwright!" she exclaimed. "Of course! In 1804 or 5. You were my partner in a polonaise? I remember!"

"At the Princess Radziwill's dance, Highness, I had the honour."

"To be sure! Ah, poor Louise, how often I think of her, and what troubles she has gone through since that day! But how—heavens, Mr. Cartwright, how do you come to be here? In Germany? And like this?"

"With a broken head?" I answered, smiling, and told her as much as I thought wise. Naturally we became friendly—the better friends I think because we shared not only a common fatherland, but a sense of humour in which those about her were wanting.

A dainty gracious figure, she moved amid the fountains and statues as if she had stepped out of a picture by Watteau; now teasing her husband who adored her, now romping with the child, now making fun of her ancient Lady-in-Waiting, who, toiling after her, spoiled her and scolded her by turns.

It must be confessed that as I grew a little stronger not only the Lady-in-Waiting, but Her Highness's whole *entourage*, furnished me with amusement which she was mischievous enough to share. The war had depleted the Grand Ducal forces by one-half—thirty of the rank and file under Graf von Heeren, the Captain of the Guard, having joined "our cousin of Prussia's army in the field."

Worse still, Napoleon's imposts had made such inroads on the treasury as to restrict the splendour of the household. One day it was the trumpets that announced His

Highness's dinner that were mute—the remaining trumpeter had a cold and could not blow! Another day it was the Lady-in-Waiting whose attendance failed—she was collecting the eggs in company with the Minister of Finance—who I suppose checked them.

On another it was the Maid of Honour who was absent—she was counting the linen. Or at times the weekly game of chess—played by the Grand Duke on a gigantic chess-board in the garden, the pieces being members of the household grotesquely disguised as Castles and Knights and the like—was threatened with ruin. Pieces were lacking, and the absent ones had to be supplied from the town; while the Court Physician was elevated to the honours of the platform in place of the Graf von Heeren, His Highness's customary opponent.

On such occasions the Grand Duchess's eyes would meet mine and twinkle, and the old Grand Duke would lift his hands to heaven and cry "*Allmächtiger Gott!*" in a tone of distress irresistibly funny. Yet let me do him justice. On one day in the week the gardens were open to the townsfolk, poor and rich, gentle and simple. Some would even bring their meals and partake of them in quiet corners.

On that day the fountains played, the four sentries mounted guard, the Grand Ducal flag flew to every air, the Grand Ducal band played; and then it was a fine and touching thing to see with what kindness and simplicity the prince mixed with his people, inquired after their concerns, or tapped their flaxen-haired children on the head, his dignity as safe from trespass as if he had been surrounded by a thousand guards. For it is a singular fact that where the gradations of rank are fixed and immutable, in practice they are often and safely ignored.

They were pleasant sunny days that I spent on the Terrace, a smiling spectator while Babetta skipped and the old Lady-in-Waiting scolded, and the fountains played and the Grand Duchess laughed. I exchanged the dressing gown in which I had made my first appearance, and which I fancy had once graced His Highness's illustrious form, for a suit, abstracted I suspect from the Ober-Förster's wardrobe.

Later I left my chair and day by day wandered farther from it, and presently I descended to the Gardens. And I should have been as content as I was grateful, had I been care-free. But, as my strength returned, anxiety, thoughts of the past and fear for the future, returned with it.

What was passing at home ? At the Office ? What was being said of me, and thought of me ? Soon, very soon, I must be moving, I must be leaving this haven, I must be facing the world and its chill.

Sooner indeed than I expected. For one day when the Duchess was talking to me—a little disjointedly I fancied, and as if she had something on her mind—Babetta ran up to her. " I want my Norma ! I want my Norma ! " she cried pettishly.

" And so do I, Liebling," her mother replied. " And next week, *Gott sei gedankt,* I shall have her, and a good angel-like child—instead of the runagate, much-to-mischief-inclined imp that I have."

" Who is Norma, Highness ? " I asked, though I had little doubt of the answer.

" Babetta's governess, Fräulein Mackay—a quite delightful young person of whom I am fond. She has been absent two months attending her father, who is ill—at Altona."

" Danish then ? " I said. " But the name sounds——"

" Scotch, of course, and so is she. But her father is in the Danish service—was in the Swedish, but passed over with the territory. So Danish we call her—since to be English is not very safe here, you understand. Which brings me, Mr. Cartwright," more gravely, " to something I have been wishing to say to you. Do you know that I am not very easy about you, my friend ? "

" Indeed ? "

She nodded.

CHAPTER VI

The Unwelcome Guest

"Has something occurred," I asked, "to—to——"

"To make me uneasy?" the Grand Duchess replied. "No," breaking off and speaking to the child, who had returned to her side, "No, Babetta, run away and play now. I am talking to Mr. Cartwright. If you are tired of skipping, go and feed the carp. Has something occurred?" she continued, returning to me. "Yes, I am sorry to say that something has, of a rather serious kind. Naturally when you were brought here and it was not thought that you would live, no secret was made of your presence. The police, here and at the Prussian frontier, seven miles away, were informed, and there was a hue and cry after your assailants. Later, when it came to my ears that you were English, the household were charged to say nothing about it, and I fancy that the order was observed. Nevertheless, some hint of the fact must have leaked out, for two days ago I learned that inquiries were being made about you, and made by the last man whom the Grand Duke would willingly take into his confidence."

"Indeed," I said. The news was unpleasant, but the desire to bear oneself well before a woman led me to speak lightly. "And who—if I may presume to inquire, Highness—is this inquisitive gentleman?"

"The Burgomaster, Huth. A wretched tool—in the French interests. A man whom we have long suspected of being employed to spy upon us."

"And you fear that he is on the track?"

"He has undoubtedly made inquiries; and if he learns for certain that you are an Englishman it may not stop there. An Englishman is as rare here as a white crow. And in as much peril. And you have no passport or papers, you see."

"They were taken from me by the robbers."

"Just so, my friend, but who will believe that? And

you were disguised as a Bursch—that is the difficulty. I do not wish to alarm you," but I could see that she was no little alarmed herself, "but if Huth comes to suspect that you are a spy, you will be in considerable danger."

"Just so," I rejoined with as much indifference as I could muster. "I see that. But even so I can hardly think that this Huth would dare——"

"To interfere with the Grand Duke's guest?" Her lip curled. "No, thank God, we have not come down to that, Mr. Cartwright, low as we have fallen! No! He would not dare, presumptuous as he is! But, alas, that is not the end of the story. The armies on the Danube are dispersing, and large bodies of French troops are marching northwards on their return to the Hansa towns. Mostly they pass by way of Leipzig or Hameln. But detachments have gone by Wittenberg, and yesterday a request, which in our situation"—again her lip curled—"is a command, was received in the town to provide quarters, brandy and bread for five hundred men. Someone of importance is with them, for the largest house in the town is being prepared for him. Now, what I fear is that Huth may communicate his suspicions to the French on their passage, and in that event your situation may become perilous. It is for that reason I have thought it right to speak to you."

The child was playing within sight, the sun of a warm October still shone, the splash of the fountains still fell pleasantly on the ear—but I felt a chill creep over me. The gardens with their flowers and statues, their glitter and gaiety, took on the look of the drop-scene of a theatre, behind which the real drama was preparing. With difficulty I suppressed a shiver, and "You think then, Highness—and I am infinitely grateful to you for your solicitude—you think that I ought to go before——"

"Before the French arrive?" gravely. "I do. I am ashamed to say it, Mr. Cartwright, but were I to tell you that the Grand Duke could protect you I should be doing you a wrong. His Highness, sovereign prince as he is, has not the power to protect you, if suspicion be once aroused! No, alas! No more than the Grand Duke

of Baden had to protect his unhappy guest at Ettingen, or than the Free City of Nuremberg to save that poor bookseller whom they murdered at Brantzau! If the King of Prussia, even before Jena, dared not move a man to succour his subjects in Anspach, if after our downfall he failed to secure the safety of his own Minister, Stein, you may guess what protection you are likely to enjoy in our little Duchy! "Why," with a gesture of despair, "even my brother in Ross-shire has more real power among his factors and cotters—ay, a hundred times more—than has the Grand Duke in his dominions if but one word fall from the mouth of Napoleon! Shame on us, shame on us, but it is so! Still——" speaking more lightly, though her heightened colour proved how much she was moved—"still we are not come to that yet. There is no call for immediate haste. You are still weak, and this is but Tuesday. The French do not arrive until Friday! If you leave us on Thursday it will be soon enough, and this will give you two more days in which to regain strength. We will see that you cross the frontier safely, and in twenty-four hours you may be in Berlin, where you will be in a better position to defend yourself."

"Certainly," I agreed, and added some words of heartfelt thanks. "Certainly I will do that. To the Danish Ministry I can look for some protection, and Baron Bronberg is an old acquaintance. I shall alight there. Count Hardenberg also knows me, and when I tell him my story he can hardly refuse to grant me a safe conduct."

She looked her relief, and became once more her charming self. "Good!" she said. "That is a great relief to me. Your presence once recognized in Berlin, your position will be altered. After that, whatever is done will be the affair of every *Chancellerie*, and even Napoleon will not be anxious to touch the person of an Envoy *au nez du monde entier*. Yet," rubbing her piquant nose with the handle of her fan, "I do not know what he will not dare; he has so often overridden every law, and every privilege! Ah, the despot!"

"But only," I replied cheerfully, for I had until Friday and the risk was dissipated as soon as seen—

" where the prize has been worth the odium. And I cannot flatter myself that I am of so much value. I may incur a short detention in Berlin, or at worst be interned until the end of the war."

" But even that," with a grimace, " would not be pleasant."

" No, but compared with the fate of a spy it is a small matter. In the present, Highness," I added with feeling, " I am more concerned how I may express my profound gratitude to you and to the Grand Duke for all your kindness."

" To the Grand Duke—*c'est ça*, Monsieur ! His heart is of gold—no one knows it better than I ! But for me," with emotion, " am I not a countrywoman ? Am I not also English ? Have I not also a right to be proud—proud when I think that it is my country that stands, ever and unflinching, in the tyrant's way ? That thwarts his schemes, and tarnishes his triumphs, and alone bars his way to that Empire of the world at which he aims. Ay, and that, for every enemy, every coalition his genius overthrows, raises up another enemy and even another coalition ! What prizes had been Malta and Egypt, my friend, if Nelson had not destroyed him at the Nile ! How splendid Austerlitz, if Trafalgar had not destroyed its value ! How welcome Wagram, if Talavera had not poisoned the cup ! He may flatter himself that he is Charlemagne, but while the tides flow, and the sea is salt, and England stands, he will never be Alexander ! English ? Ah, but I am proud to be English ! To be more English than the English—as is every exile ! I am more proud of, more conscious of the mother that bred me, than the home-children ! And shall an Englishman thank me when I succour him ? Shall I not rather thank fortune for the opportunity ? "

Her feeling so irradiated her beauty that I could liken her to no one I had ever seen except to her friend, the Patriot Queen, the Queen of Prussia and of Hearts. I could not trust myself to speak. I bent over her hand and kissed it.

She blushed, not at my action, but at her own vehemence. And smiling, " Now I leave you, my friend," she

said. "You have two days. Eat, drink, and grow strong. Play battledore with Babetta. Her Norma returns to-morrow, and it fits in well. The return carriage can convey you to Berlin on Thursday. As far as we can, we will see that you are provided with all things fitting, and when the opportunity occurs you can repay me with caps *à l'anglaise* and millinery from Bond Street. Dear, delightful Bond Street, how I long to walk down your pavement!"

She tripped, laughing, away, and not before it was time if I was to leave her without a heartache. Shall I be thought the worse, shall I appear very silly, if I own that I spent the next half-hour in foolish musings—in dreams of what might have been had we met earlier, had I been the first to besiege that loyal and generous heart, to encounter the smiles of those arch and bewitching eyes, and had there been no Grand Duke of Zerbst to force me to raise my plebeian siege.

At any rate, that is what I did, and I had been more or less than man if I had not. But at length with a laugh at my folly I shook myself out of my tender musings, I paid to her beauty and her goodness the tribute of a sigh, and turned to the review of my own affairs.

It would not be pleasant to tell my story to Hardenberg. The figure I should cut in the German Minister's eyes would be little to my credit. And, the story told and that ordeal over, I was but at the beginning of my troubles. I had still the Office at home to face and the Chief; and I could imagine no colour that I could put upon my actions that would commend them either to the one or the other.

And Perceval Ellis—who had doubtless returned seething with indignation, and denouncing my desertion? And my colleagues who would one and all condemn me? It was plain, too plain, that whatever face I might succeed in putting upon the situation, I could not hope to escape reprimand, and certainly I could not hope for further employment. It would be much if, by the use of my small influence and the intercession of friends, I could escape the brand of dismissal.

And all because in a moment of irritation I had lost

my temper and taken one false step! All, I now saw, because of that d—d Klatz, and my feeling about him! What a stupid fool I had been to suspect the man, and to persist in my suspicions!

Ten to one—witness the attack on Ellis at Wittenberg, whither I and not Klatz had insisted on going—he had been as innocent as I, and as ignorant. Now that I reviewed the matter coldly I saw this; and I saw, too, that the fact, which I should not be able to deny, riddled my only defence through and through.

The gaiety and glitter of the gardens, laid out after the fashion of Versailles—but how unlike the Versailles I had last seen in '02, triste and deserted!—were so little in unison with my thoughts that I presently retired to my room. Here I stood awhile, gazing at the portrait of the girl on the easel, but in truth sunk in a reverie so deep that I saw nothing of that which was before my eyes. Later, and as I awoke to the face before me, I was seized with wonder at the series of chances that had first presented the girl to me in her own person, and then in this limned semblance.

I fancied or I saw in the grave eyes and the drooping lips something of the loneliness and appeal which the girl's attitude had betrayed on that ill-starred evening at Wittenberg. The eyes that met mine, that followed me to whatever part of the room I went, that seemed to be trying to convey to me a message or a warning, wrought on me, impressed me with a sense of tragedy, inspired me with a vague apprehension.

Fancy, of course, pure fancy, I told myself! And on the morrow I should be convinced of it. I should see the girl as she was, and the chances were that the light of everyday life would dissipate at a stroke this bizarre impression and with it the spell which the brooding eyes and oval face, so often viewed, had laid upon me. After all, it was not hard to account for the impression, for I had begun by seeing the girl ill at ease and in strange surroundings, and doubtless I had let the circumstances colour my vision.

To-morrow I should see her alight full of life and spirits, thankful that the weary journey was over, and delighted

to return to a *milieu* that welcomed her. In place of the Ophelia that I had created, I should see a commonplace English Fräulein, with no weeds in her hair and no cloud in her life, descend from a dusty German postchaise as little romantic as herself.

Which, nevertheless, was a sight I was not to see. There was indeed to be an arrival on the Wednesday, but the newcomer did not turn out to be Fräulein Mackay. That was my last day at the Schloss, and Babetta had commanded me to a final game at battledore after dinner. We had retired for the purpose to her favourite playground, a circle of fine turf, surrounded by a lime hedge, wherein four ancient moss-grown seats of carved stone stood recessed.

We had been playing for some time, the shuttlecock had been in the air for an unconscionable period, and I remember that Babetta, her childish treble quivering with excitement, was counting the strokes, when—I think it must have been about three o'clock, for I was facing south-west and the sun was in my eyes—I heard an impatient voice summoning me by name. I turned to see who wanted me, made my stroke too late, and the shuttlecock fell to the ground.

"Oh, clumsy!" cried Babetta. "There hundred and forty! And we might have gone on to——"

"*Freiherr! Freiherr!*" Breathless with running a page appeared at the entrance to the circle. "You are to go to your room, if you please! *Auf einmal!*"

"*Wunderbar!*" I exclaimed. "Why, lad? What has happened?"

"Her Highness sent me!" the boy panted. "It is an order. I was to take you back."

But Babetta broke in, stamping with anger. "Pig! *Dummer Junge!*" she shrieked. "How dare you intrude? How dare you break in in this fashion when I——"

"Stop! Stop!" I said. "Let me understand! If it is Her Highness's order——"

"It is, *Freiherr*, it is!" the boy said eagerly. "I was to take you back at once by the way I came."

I threw down my battledore. "Excuses, Princess!"

I said. "I must obey." Then to the lad, "Go on, I am with you." It was strange, and rather disturbing, but there must be a reason for it.

I left Babetta, still screaming out childish abuse, and I followed the boy. Skirting one hedge and another, turning this way and that, but always under covert—no doubt the young rascal had played truant in his time—we traversed the gardens as far as the foot of the steps leading up to the Terrace. There the boy signed to me to pause, and moving before me, he looked up and down. Apparently he found the coast clear, for he beckoned to me to advance, and together we hurried across the open space.

But safe in my room I collared him. "Now, *mein Knabe*, out with it!" I said. "What is it? What is the matter? If this is any trick of you young scamps——"

"*Nein! Nein!*" he cried. "Her Highness bade me and I obeyed. And I contrived it cleverly, eh?" with a grin. "Oh, I knew the way. But I fancy, if you must know, Excellency——"

"Yes?"

"That someone has arrived unlooked for, and Her Highness," slyly, "does not wish you to be seen."

"Oh," I said. "Is that all?" But lightly as I spoke I felt a check. Who could it be whose coming loomed so important that the Grand Duchess had put herself out for him? "Then you can tell your mistress," I added, "that I have obeyed, and convey to her my grateful acknowledgments. But don't do so if she be in company."

"Have I fleas in my ear?" the young rogue replied, and with an impudent wink he ran off. But I noticed that he retired not by the window and the Terrace, but by the corridor that led through the house.

I felt anxious and I waited until the sound of his footsteps had died away; then I opened the door and listened. Yes, there was an unusual stir in the Schloss, a flutter of skirts as women scuttled to their rooms, a hurrying of feet on the floor above, a slamming of doors, a murmur of voices breaking out and sinking again. Something fell with a crash, a man swore, a bell rang sharply.

"Go out by the other door, fool!" a voice, cried and a moment later as I still listened, my apprehensions

by no means allayed, the trumpets blared out, sharp, brazen, imperious—calling, I judged, the guard together.

Certainly something of moment had happened.

I wondered what it could be; wondered uneasily. I had a notion, but I did not wish to accept the notion. I left the door, I crossed the room to the window, and peeped out, keeping myself concealed. Yes, here, too, all was now commotion. Footmen were carrying out chairs, among them a State chair for the Grand Duke, another for Her Highness, a third almost as important.

The major-domo was shifting the seats here and there, sending for footstools, standing back to judge of the effect, adding a table in front of the first chair. Next, it was the Chamberlain who appeared, white staff in hand, a valet running beside him, and setting right his stock. He, too, cast a look at the arrangement, nodded, departed. His place was taken by a sergeant of the guard who posted four sentries at intervals along the edge of the Terrace. Then he, too, departed.

And now the officers of the household began to muster, red-necked, flustered old gentlemen, with powdered heads and queues, in uniforms hastily put on, and not of the newest. They grouped themselves behind the chairs, and then there followed a pause, presently broken by a murmur of voices as the Grand Duke came into view, walking beside the Grand Duchess and attended by the White Staff and two or three ladies.

As they passed my window I fancied that Her Highness cast a hasty glance at it, but I was hidden by the curtains. They took their seats, and simultaneously the Court Physician, last to arrive, came bustling up, puffing and blowing, from the Gardens, his face under his huge white wig almost as scarlet as his coat.

Then, another pause. I had time to note that the Grand Duke wore the Black Eagle on his grey silk coat and that the Grand Duchess's bodice flashed with diamonds set about a portrait. The Grand Duke said something, Her Highness slowly waved her fan. Suddenly the trumpets blared out again. I caught a sound of footsteps advancing along the Terrace, the clink of a sword, the ring of spurs. The Grand Duke rose to his

feet, stately and benevolent, an old-fashioned figure, not unimposing. I looked out eagerly.

The Chamberlain came into sight first; behind him, a small stoutish man in uniform—a blue coat, girt about the waist with a broad gold sash with pendant ends, white breeches, high boots. The stiff upstanding collar of his coat was embroidered with gold, and he wore gold spurs. A trim, brisk man in the prime of life, he advanced with a firm step, his head high. Behind him walked two officers their breasts glittering, their hands on their hilts. The Chamberlain stood aside, bowed low.

"Monseigneur le Maréchal le Prince d'Eckmühl," he announced in his voice of ceremony. "To wait upon their Highnesses."

"I am happy in the opportunity," said the small stoutish man in a courteous tone.

Davout!

Ay, Davout! Of all men the last whom I desired to see. It was Davout—he who had governed Belgium, had governed Poland, who now governed Germany as Napoleon's pro-consul! Whose harsh régime, mitigated only by the iron discipline that he maintained, whose devotion to his master, whose hatred of England, were commonplaces in the mouths of those whose business it was to weigh men! I felt a chill run down my spine, and interposing a curtain I fell back from the window.

This was certainly the last man by whom I could wish to be discovered! I was English, in a country where no Englishman might be, and I was without papers or passport, lurking in what might pass for a disguise! More I was within twenty miles of the jealously guarded fortresses of Magdeburg and Torgau.

To be discovered in such circumstances and by such a man might expose me to serious risk, and I no longer wondered that Her Highness had with such haste consigned me to my room, or that in the panic caused by the Marshal's sudden arrival she had found no time to explain matters.

Having withdrawn from the window, I failed to be a witness of what passed during the first minute or two. Then curiosity got the better of alarm, and reflecting that

the man could have no reason to suspect my presence, I returned to my place. Screened by the curtain I looked out.

He was seated now, and, leaning a little back in his chair, was engaged in conversation with the Duchess, whose fan, moving to and fro, betrayed I thought a *soupçon* of nervousness. He held his plumed hat in his lap—a bald little man, with nothing but a good breadth of forehead and something of hardness in his eyes to distinguish him from other men.

I recalled the portrait drawn of him by one who had seen him at Anspach in 1805—a little, smooth-pated unpretentious man, who was never tired of dancing—and inadequate as it had seemed at the time, I now found it strangely near the mark.

But he did not impress me the less on that account. On the contrary, he was, it was quite true, a little, smooth-pated man with easy, polished manners, and I could picture him waltzing with all a small man's verve and abandon—a figure that in a salon would not attract a second glance. But then, I reflected, how much must lie behind that deceptive appearance! What formidable things!

What an iron will, what a ruthless determination, what an intense devotion to his master, what a fanatical hatred of that master's enemies! This little man had been the ruler of many lands, and now in Prussia was the power behind the throne, implacable, irresistible! In his easy manners I found nothing strange, for almost alone among Napoleon's marshals he was of the old noblesse. But at nineteen he had cut himself off from his caste, had flung himself into the Revolution, and at twenty-one he had broken the fiery, unruly elements of the Revolution to the discipline he loved.

He had fought his way upwards, seeing service in every land, had commanded under the First Consul the cavalry of the Army of Italy; at the Emperor's accession had received his baton, by virtue, it was said at the time, of his connection with the Buonaparte family, rather than on his merits. But on the fourteenth of October, 1805, Prussia's fatal day, he had silenced his critics and had

earned, as no other marshal ever earned, the jealousy of the master he served.

For on the very day on which Napoleon at Jena had crushed a wing of the Prussian forces, Davout, deserted by Bernadotte, who should have covered him, had defeated the main body at Aüerstadt, a clear interval of thirteen miles separating the two battles.

An interval surely sufficient! But it had not suited Napoleon to acknowledge it. With a decision as audacious as politic, he had treated the two conflicts as one and had taken to himself his Marshal's laurels. And Davout had accepted the decision. He had hidden his thoughts and been silent.

He had continued to serve with the same stern fidelity, and at Wagram, when all hung in the balance, and Napoleon's star seemed trembling to its wane, he had, by the most delicate operation of the day, turned the Austrian flank, dislodged him by desperate fighting from his position on the heights, and decided the campaign.

He had done this almost under my own eyes—the little smooth-pated man, who now sat, leaning slightly forward, holding his hat on his knees as he chatted. There was no one, it was said, whom Napoleon trusted so entirely. He was Head of the Military Police of the Empire, and among the duties specially assigned to him was the secret service.

In Belgium he had made it his boast that he had hung every spy to the last man. And he was noted for his hatred of England, which he regarded as the irreconcilable foe, the stirrer-up of strife, the fomenter of war, the nation of shop-keepers, that paid others to fight its battles!

Altogether, a very remarkable and a very formidable little man. Fond of dancing? Yes, but how many men had he sent to dance on nothing!

CHAPTER VII

Suspense

No doubt under other circumstances the man would not have impressed me so strongly. I should have viewed him with curiosity, perhaps even with admiration. But as things were, the sight of him, the very unimpressiveness of him, when one did not meet the hard directness of his gaze, chilled me. If he discovered my presence the consequences might be serious, for even to be interned in Magdeburg till the end of the war would not be pleasant, and that might not be the worst.

In 1801 I had seen Buonaparte and talked with him face to face. I had met Masséna, and spoken to Lannes—in the same year. And in 1805 I had become acquainted with Berthier at the Corbetz reviews. But Davout I had never met, and such proof of my identity as he might be willing to accept would not be easy to obtain.

I had reached this stage when I saw that the party was breaking up. The Marshal was taking leave of the Grand Duke. I could hear more than one exchange of "Monseigneur" for "Votre Altesse." But no, it was the Grand Duke who was withdrawing; the Marshal remained and under Her Highness's guidance was descending to the gardens. Women are more adaptable than men, and I suspected that she was more at her ease with the formidable visitor than her husband, who, good easy man, benevolent but not clever, might well feel himself overweighted.

The two were not long away. A few minutes only elapsed before they re-appeared on the Terrace, and now I thought that Davout would certainly go. But no, again I was disappointed; the two began to pace up and down, apparently on the best of terms.

As they passed the window I caught fragments of conversation, and I guessed that the Grand Duchess had been felicitating the Marshal on his new title, for "I am infinitely obliged to Your Highness" reached me, "and

to be frank I am grateful to the Emperor, for his kindness relieves me from an embarrassment. My old title of Aüerstadt has an unpleasant sound in Prussian ears, and I would not willingly——"

I lost the rest, but a moment later they passed again, and this time I noticed that the lady looked a trifle put out—her colour was higher, her fan moved more quickly. Whether she had ventured to reproach him for his severity, I could not say, but I judged that something of the kind had passed between them, for his manner was that of one politely defending himself. "*C'est pourtant, j'avone, un rude métier que je fais,*" I heard him say.

After that they were absent a little longer, and when they again came into sight I observed that the Grand Duchess's face wore a more gentle look. She was listening attentively, her countenance turned towards the Marshal, her fan hanging idly from her wrist. Unluckily he was not speaking as they went by, and I gained no clue to the subject which had brought that softer look to her eyes.

A moment later the two officers, who had spent their time in conversation with the household, disengaged themselves with many bows, and I guessed that Davout was taking leave—but away to the right, beyond my sight, where the end of the Terrace abutted on the entrance gates, and the town.

Two minutes later Her Highness appeared at my window, but I own that it irritated me to see that her face still wore that softened look. "No, you must not come out, Mr. Cartwright," she said, glancing quickly to right and left. "Please do not show yourself. I will tell you why presently."

"At any rate your Highness has spent a pleasant hour," I said, grudgingly. For hitherto I had had a kind of monopoly of her, and I could not bear that the enemy should share her goodwill. And then, while all this had been going on, here had I been hidden out of the way in my room! "And made a charming acquaintance," I added.

She did not see, or would not see, my ill-temper. "He has a heart," she replied. "One would not think so from all one has heard, Mr. Cartwright. But it is so."

"He appears to have proved it to you," I said.

She looked at me, a gleam of amusement in her eyes. "To be sure," she said, "he is not a stock or a stone. He was telling me about——" And she paused, willing I think to draw me on.

"About what—if I may presume to inquire?" I asked, rising sulkily to the fly.

"About his wife, monsieur," with a *moue*, half triumphant, half tender. "Of his Aimée, who is certainly his Bien Aimée! To whom he writes every day, *bien entendu*, this man of iron. Oh, he was delightful, I assure you, while he talked of her. He might have been a little *boutiquier*, six months married, and separated from his Marthe or his Mathilde! Or a *preux chevalier*, like Mr. Cartwright, six days engaged to his—to his Norma, shall I say," her laughing eyes passing by me, and pouncing by chance on the portrait behind me—"and sighing for the honeymoon! Oh, I assure you he was charming in that mood, M. le Prince!"

"Her Highness amuses herself," I said. I could not help it.

She made an odd little face at me. "And Mr. Cartwright—what is he doing? Is it possible that he is fain to amuse himself also? Fie, my friend! Who was homeless and we took him in? Friendless and we comforted him?" Her tone grew more grave. "Hungry and thirsty and we——"

But I could not bear that she should go on, and "Forgive me, forgive me, Highness!" I cried. After all, it was but a passing folly—what right had I to be jealous? "I am an ungrateful beast! Believe me, I shall never forget the kindness I have received from you—and from the Grand Duke."

"That is better," she said. "For it is due to him. He is the best of men. And indeed we have no time to quarrel, Mr. Cartwright—no time and no reason, my friend, for we must part—here and now. The Prince sups with us and I must be dressing. And you must be going—while you may. The Fräulein has not returned—I know not why, for she should have been here hours ago. But you cannot wait, and I have ordered that a carriage shall be ready for you at five to-morrow morning."

"Then the Marshal——"

She nodded. "Yes, he has heard some word of you, I fear. I fear so. He informed the Grand Duke that there was a matter on which he desired to see him to-morrow—a trifle, but unpleasant. And I have no doubt that Huth has seen him. But, *n'importe*! If you start as I have said, at five to-morrow, you will be half way to Berlin before the storm breaks."

"I am sorry that the Grand Duke should be incommoded," I said lamely.

She shrugged her shoulders. "After all—he is the Grand Duke," with a touch of pride. "And with you safe and out of reach we can afford to smile even though Monseigneur le Prince frowns. His Highness will tell him who you are and that you will be found, if he desires to question you, in Berlin. He can then take what steps he pleases. You will have been identified by that time and no great harm can happen to you. And now, Mr. Cartwright," and as she gave me her hand, she looked at me very kindly, "we must say farewell."

"Say rather, *au revoir*," I answered, hardly able to control my voice, "In better times, Madam."

"Alas," sorrowfully, "the better times may be long in coming! And you—are going home! Home, my friend!" And there was I know not what of pathos in her voice. "You will see the sea and the white cliffs of England, you will walk in Bond street, you will hear the dear English tongue, hear the very beggars speak it! And one day perhaps you will hear the grouse call, and watch the autumn sun reddening the bracken on the hills that fall down to Loch Duich! But there, farewell, farewell, Mr. Cartwright. Think of me sometimes, my friend."

She turned abruptly away, but I knew that there were tears in her eyes. And I—I could not have spoken had I wished!

I sat for an hour, feeling very lonely and making perhaps a little more of my melancholy than was necessary. I understood that I was not to show myself, and as the evening closed in, and the corners of the room grew shadowy, until even the face on the easel gleamed but

palely through the dusk, I felt myself deserted. The servants were busy with the entertainment and did not come near me.

Now and again a thin stream of music penetrated to my ears and I guessed that the Grand Ducal band was playing at the supper. Once, some door being open, I caught the lilt of a gavotte, one of Handel's I fancied, and I thought that all the world was gay but I.

A little later a servant brought in lights and my supper, and later still the Grand Duke's secretary appeared, and with something more of secrecy than I thought was called for, placed in my hands half a dozen rouleaux of thalers ; a sum amply, nay generously sufficient for the expenses of my journey, which nevertheless it was not quite pleasant to receive.

However, I was penniless, and there was no help for it, and as I drew out a receipt—the secretary I could see thought his master unduly lavish—I tried to make my acknowledgments commensurate with the man's expectations.

The receipt given, he laid on the table a handsome fur cloak—almost as handsome a cloak as that which I had provided for the Envoy Extraordinary when in the first blush of hope and exhilaration I had left England for Vienna. " His Highness trusts that you will accept this in memory of your visit," he said.

It was a kind and thoughtful gift and I knew whom I had to thank for it. I accepted it, and requested him to convey my most grateful thanks to His Highness. " Is the Prince of Eckmühl still here ? " I asked as the man prepared to leave me.

" Yes. Her Highness," an unexpected gleam of humour in his eyes, " is graciously singing to him—English ballads."

" Witching the beast with hostile minstrelsy " rose to my lips, but I crushed down the indiscretion, and only said, " So ! Indeed ! "

Again the man yielded to his feelings. " Even a black cow gives white milk," he said " if properly milked."

" To be sure," I assented as gravely. " It is true."

" Then *mein Herr* will be called at four ? " he rejoined,

as he turned to the door. "The carriage will be at the entrance gates at five, if he will be good enough to be ready."

I replied that I would be ready, and with a final bow he left me, the receipt in his hand. A stiff fellow, but with an unusual streak of humour in him—for a German.

They kept early hours at the Schloss, and I went betimes to bed, still feeding my melancholy. For an hour or more I sighed most romantically; and then having real troubles to face, and turning my mind to them—and trouble is a rare fosterer of slumber—I fell asleep. Two or three times during the night I awoke and nervously consulted my watch by the light of the *veilleuse*, but always to find that the hour for rising was not come.

Then, as often happens, a little before the time I went off into a sound nap, and when I awoke the sun was not only up, but was flooding my chamber with its beams. I leapt out of bed in a panic; it must be long past four! Had they forgotten to call me? Or what had happened? There was a handbell on the table, and hastily drawing on some clothes I opened the door and rang the hand-bell in the passage. I glanced at my watch. It wanted little of seven. Seven! Good heavens!

I was vexed beyond measure, and fearing that I was in fault, I was the less able to curb my impatience. I opened the door again and looked out. No one! The corridor was empty. I fetched the bell and was about to ring it more loudly when I heard slipshod feet coming my way, and a moment later the old lady who had nursed me appeared, emerging from a side-passage. I did not wait for her to reach me. "Why was I not called," I cried in wrath, "at four as was arranged? It is seven o'clock. Seven!"

"Hist!" she muttered, and glanced over her shoulders. Then, "It is not so simple as that, young gentleman. The gates are watched; it's lucky for you we learned it in time. There is no going out or in—for you. The great man who was here yesterday has seen to that, though he looked as if butter wouldn't melt in his mouth, plague take him! You don't want to walk into the mouse-trap, do you?"

" But what is to be done then ? " I asked, aghast. This was serious news.

" That is to be seen," she rejoined with German phlegm. " Truth is I don't know. But for the present you'd best go back to your room and stay there. Stay there and keep close, young gentleman. There's others thinking for you, and more than you deserve if you ask me," with a sharp look.

" But if I cannot get out ? "

She shrugged her shoulders. " After all the coil's of your own making," she said. " No use to blame us ! "

CHAPTER VIII

A Game of Chess

That was cold comfort, and so I found it when old Martha had gone and in obedience to her warning I had sneaked back to my room and closed the door. The money that the Grand Duke had sent me lay on the table, the fur cloak hung across a chair, and as I dressed I eyed them wistfully. For, by this time, had things gone as we had planned, I should have been far on the road to Berlin.

Instead, I was cooped up here, forbidden to show myself, a fugitive without the excitement of flight. And all too clearly I recognized that the sentimental dejection of the evening before had been so much time wasted, which it would have been wiser in me to devote to the consideration of my own plight, and the prospect before me.

What was the prospect before me? In effect, if it was indeed on my account that the gates were watched, if things had reached that point, my position might become serious indeed. But how serious I still shrank from deciding. The diplomat soon learns, it is the first lesson he does learn, that his person is sacred.

The consequence is that, lapped in personal security, and taught to consider that he is not as other men, he finds it hard to believe that either his life or his liberty is threatened. Even when they are menaced, he is reluctant to admit it, since by the admission he strips himself of his privilege. Instinctively, then, he turns his eyes from the danger point, and persuades himself that the thing cannot be.

That had been my own habit of mind, even when I had warned Perceval Ellis that the journey he proposed to take was not without its perils. For I had not really put much faith in those perils; and now when they seemed to be taking a solid and a very ugly shape, the old habit persisted, and I would fain shy from the grisly apparition. It was not the kind of thing that I had been accustomed to face, and I shrank from admitting that I was really cast for the part.

But I could not altogether shut my eyes to facts. The French in their German campaign had lived on the country, but they had not been guilty of gross excesses. Discipline had been maintained. But against the rights of States, and the privileges of ambassadors, they had again and again transgressed.

In the case of Rumbold, of Wagstaffe the messenger, of Taylor at Cassel, of Wynn at Dresden, they had gone out of their way to trample upon international usage; and they had done this with a vengeance wherever an Englishman was in question.

That being so, I could not deny that the position in which I had placed myself laid me open. I might be an envoy, or attached to one. But I had nothing about me to prove it, no attendants, no credentials, no papers. And Davout might deny the fact, and maintain that in travelling where I was, in disguise, off the main road, and in the neighbourhood of his fortresses, I had forfeited my claim to protection.

It is an old sour saying, proverbial among soldiers, that every ambassador is a spy; and if the Marshal could lay hands on me, the case might be made to look very unpleasant.

Then I had to consider that, if the worst happened, England was far, and if the news ever crossed the sea what could England do beyond what she was doing? There would be a protest, protocols, rejoinders—I knew the file by heart; but nothing would be done, the conversations would die away, and in twelve months the incident and my fate would be alike forgotten.

So I passed, I confess, some very uneasy moments that morning, now pacing the room, now listening at the door; and even with pride to help me I had much ado to keep panic at bay. And I had nothing to distract me, no employment, no means of learning what was passing, or what impended. About nine a servant brought me tea and a roll, but, glum and stolid, the man had nothing to say. I fancied that he looked at me curiously, and that was all.

It was ten before anything happened. Then at last I caught the sound of footsteps in the corridor, and

someone knocked sharply at my door. I opened it, thankful that here at length was something, no matter what, to break the monotony of suspense. With astonishment I found the Grand Duchess herself, standing outside.

She had the old Gräfin von Hess in attendance, and a single glance showed me that the sentiment of the previous evening had vanished. Her eyes met mine with a look as keen and direct as eyes of so liquid a blue could cast.

Moreover, she opened with no word of greeting, but "Mr. Cartwright," she said, her voice as sharp as her looks, "What is this story about Wittenberg? Tell me at once, if you please! And briefly, for I must not be missed, and my time is short."

"About Wittenberg?" I exclaimed, more surprised than I can say. Indeed for a moment I was puzzled.

"Yes, yes, of Wittenberg—and you? They have some story—it has come to the Prince of Eckmühl's ears—that you were at a restaurant there drinking toasts—toasts that you should not have drunk—with a party of students. Drinking to Major Schill—that unfortunate! They have chapter and verse for it, and I cannot tell you how important it is that you should be able to deny the tale."

If she had struck me in the face, I should hardly have been more taken aback. I could not speak, I could not utter a word. The affair at the Rathskeller had passed so entirely from my mind that for weeks I had not given a thought to it. A mere trifle at the time, it had come by now to belong to another, a far-off life. Judge then what I felt, judge of my dismay, when at this most unfortunate moment it rose to confront me.

I suppose that my face told the tale, for, "You don't mean to say that it is true?" she exclaimed, clapping her hands softly together. "No, no!"

"I'm—I'm afraid it is," I faltered. "In part."

"Schill and all? Oh, Mr. Cartwright," in a voice of keen reproach. "how could you be so imprudent? How could you be so thoughtless? In your position? And what a dilemma you have placed yourself in! And us, who are helping you. I did not believe a word of it—not a syllable, when they told me!"

And still I had not a word to say. I could only look at her in shame and embarrassment. For I saw that if I told the truth, if I avowed the real motive which had led me to join those accursed students, I should condemn myself out of my own mouth. The desire to obtain information—what defence was that in the mouth of an alleged spy? I should be delivering myself into Davout's hands. I should be making his case for him—and all the case he could desire!

"Speak!" she repeated urgently. "Don't you see that?"

I found my voice at last. "You must give me up," I said. It was all I could say.

"If it were as easy as that!" she rejoined. And again she clapped her hands softly. "You know it is not. You know that we cannot do that! Oh dear, oh dear, Mr. Cartwright," in a voice of poignant distress, "how are we to save you? The Marshal is coming at twelve with a demand for you, and every gate is watched by his people. If in the meantime you put a foot outside you will be arrested, and I fear, I fear," with increasing distress, "that he is inexorable. He says that it was England that paid and inspired Schill, and that belief makes him as hard as granite. Oh, dear, dear, I do not know what we can do."

"Do nothing, Madam," I said earnestly, and I thank heaven that I was able to speak so that she saw that I meant it. "The folly was mine and I must pay for it. I will go to him and give myself up. It is the least that I can do, and after all there was nothing, nothing that passed at Wittenberg that meant anything. When I explain——"

"No!" she said firmly. "That will not do. Whatever passed they will find sufficient for their purpose. You must not do that, Mr. Cartwright. You must get to Berlin! We must pass you out somehow. Somehow!"

"But, Highness," I said stoutly. "This is my affair Let me——"

But "No! No!" she cried imperiously. "And don't distract me! I must think! I must plan something! Oh, I can manage it, I must manage it. We cannot abandon you. Only, we do not trust all about us, and I

must not be seen coming to you again. The Countess will not let me, indeed."

And in truth the old Gräfin's snowy headdress, which in the half light of the corridor looked like nothing so much as a huge cauliflower, was shaking with reprehension. "So if you get a hint, act on it at once. Do not wait. You understand?" urgently. "Act on the instant, if you hear from me. We have but until noon, and it is after ten now."

She nodded, waved her hand, and with the old lady hobbling after her, tripped away. I saw them turn the corner of the passage—they disappeared. She had not given me time to thank her.

I went into my room and I confess I was shaken. I saw my danger, saw that it was real and imminent, and for a moment I felt hot all over. But I was quite as much oppressed by doubt as by fear. What ought I to do? What was it my duty to do? Ought I to free the Grand Duke from his embarrassment and this brave woman from her responsibility by going out and giving myself up? One moment I was certain on the point, and I snatched up the cloak and looked for my hat.

The next, with my hand on the hasp of the window, I hesitated. In Berlin, with the backing I might get—in Berlin, the whole matter could be explained. And that being so, would it not be foolish of me to fling all away on the impulse of a moment? To give up all my chances and perhaps sacrifice my life—merely to save the Grand Duke from a temporary embarrassment? And the Duchess? She would not thank me, I was sure. I should only be giving her unnecessary pain.

I laid down my cloak and hat, and professional arguments came to my aid. After all, Davout had no right to arrest me within the Grand Duke's sovereignty; why should I then aid him in his usurpation? Why condone the breach by offering myself as a sheep to the slaughter? No, I would remain where I was, and if a way of escape presented itself, I would take it.

It was not the more heroic choice, and it remained to be seen whether it would avail. I had still to learn whether the Duchess's ingenuity would prove equal to

the task, and in a state of suspense, painful to remember, I awaited the event. I had until noon, it was already close on eleven. If Her Highness acted she must act quickly—quickly. I wandered from door to window. I looked out on the gardens, anxious to discern some indication, some proof, that she was at work.

Presently I perceived signs that there was something in preparation. There were movements on the Terrace, a bevy of servants crossed it and went down to the gardens. One bore a pair of long white staves, another a bundle of flags, a third a chair of state.

By and by an odd figure came into view, and began to pace the length of the Terrace. And at that my heart sank, for I recognized in the figure one of the pawns in the garden-chess game. So that was all! They were going to play chess. I was in peril, I was in suspense, the minutes were speeding by, and with true courtly frivolity they were going to—play chess!

It certainly was so, for presently another and a stranger figure appeared—a canvas-covered knight, his visor raised, bestriding a canvas hobby-horse. He paused on the Terrace, chose at his leisure a seat in the sun and, disengaging himself from his steed, sat down to wait. Then a second pawn followed, and a third, each making his way down to the gardens.

Then, in a whirl of laughter and flying garments, Babetta! Babetta, prancing and sidling, swathed in one of the chess-suits, and dragging after her a vast train. The dress was ludicrously too large for her, but undeterred by this, or by the fact that she was as good as blindfold—for nothing was visible of her face—she jigged this way and that, now waving her arms and curtseying to the windows, now with a great part of the skirts gathered up in her arms, gambolling wildly up and down.

Laughter eddied from her, and little hoots of defiance. "*Me voici! Me voici! La Tour! La Tour!*" she cried, a fantastic, leaping, freakish figure, that at another time would have amused me sufficiently. Every moment I looked to see Martha or another run out to seize her, for it was clear that the child had eloped with some one's dress.

But no one came after her, and presently she reached a spot opposite to my window. There she fell to a new play, whirling round one way until she had wound her train about her legs, then pirouetting the other way until she was again enmeshed. She had done this twice when I caught the note of a whistle, and as quickly the strange figure bounded to my window and tapped on it.

I opened it, dumbfounded ; she tumbled into the room, and in a trice, struggling frantically, had disengaged her flushed, laughing face and tumbled hair.

" Did I not do it well ? " she panted. " It is for you, Monsieur. Put it on, and when the whistle sounds again, join that knight on the seat there, and go down to the chess. You are a Castle—you have no face, you look through these holes. Hauser—Hauser is the Knight—will tell you where to stand. You are Chemnitz the herbalist, if anyone asks you. When the game is over go straight out through the gates with the other pieces—there are seven or eight from the town—and go down the main street till you come to Puckler's on the right side, next the bridge. He has a carriage waiting for you."

The lesson—it was evidently a lesson—tripped fluently off her tongue, but before it was half told I had caught her drift, and had begun to drag on the ungainly garment that she had put off. Distended by circular wires, and borne on the shoulders by straps, it was, viewed from outside, a fair imitation of a round tower.

" Did I not do it well ? " she repeated, in high glee. " That whistle was to say that there was no one looking. It is the best dress of all for hiding one."

" Am I right, Princess ? " I asked.

" *Parfaitement !* But no ! When Chemnitz wears it he fills it. The walls stick out."

I hurried it off again, and slipped into the fur cloak, remembered the money, too, and pocketed it. Then on with the Castle masque again, " Is that better ? "

She clapped her hands. " Oh *magnifique* ! Colossal ! Now you are stout—like a German ! "

" Good," I said. " Will you be good enough to take a message for me to Her Highness ? Will you tell her——"

But the whistle sounded and cut me short, and Babetta pushed me towards the window. "*Tout de suite! Tout de suite!*" she urged. "Go to Hauser! You see him? Go down with him. Do what he tells you!"

I hastened to obey, climbing clumsily through the window on to the Terrace. For a moment, the scope of my vision limited by the eyelet holes, I was at a loss. Then I picked up the Knight who was mounting his hobby-horse at leisure, and I moved stiffly towards him.

He bade me by a gesture to accompany him, and "Right hand square, back line is yours," he muttered, as we proceeded slowly, and cautiously, holding up our skirts, down the stone steps to the gardens. "I am next to you. And say little, *gnädige Herr*—Chemnitz is a sulky fellow. When it is over join me—I also am going into the town. Slowly, slowly, *mein Herr*! Do not hurry!"

Sauntering with as easy an air as a man can assume whose limbs are swaddled in a long nightshirt, and his head in a linen-basket, I arrived by his side at the ground.

It was a warm day for the end of October, and the sun shone on a scene certainly strange. The pieces, some red, some white, and thirty in number, lounged or chatted in twos and threes on either side of the board. This was a rectangular space, paved in alternate squares with black and white marble and framed in smooth green sward. At either end rose a wide marble rostrum finely designed, and so shaped that the middle and the two ends curved forward.

Each of these balconies was capacious enough to seat five or six persons, besides the player whose chair of state occupied the middle projection. Against the black and white pavement and the green turf the scattered pieces in their red or white masques produced a gay and lively effect; so much so, indeed, that though my heart beat more quickly than was pleasant, and between the heat and the lack of air I was in a perspiration, I could not but admire it.

I fancy that my arrival had been carefully timed. But accidents will happen, and one had perhaps delayed the Grand Ducal party, for there was a pause which I found very trying. Hauser, engaging me in talk at a little distance from the others, shielded me as well as he

could from strange overtures; but presently one of the other pieces, a Bishop, crossed the board towards me, evidently with the intention of joining us.

Hauser did what he could. He seized the man by his dress, drew him aside, and for a minute or more held him in conversation. But the Bishop was pertinacious and restive; he had business, it appeared, with Chemnitz, and twice he tried to get round my friend. The third time he succeeded. Breaking from Hauser's detaining hand he took me by a loose fold of my disguise, and——

"Chemnitz," he said, "how is it to be? Are you going to give me the price of that ham? It's yes or no, man, for I can't wait any longer. Is it a bargain?"

"Nein!" I grunted, perspiring more than ever, and wishing with all my heart that he and his ham were in a still hotter place. "Nein! Nein!"

"Eh! What?" in angry surprise. "You won't? Oh, but you can't treat me so to the rules of business contrary. I kept it for you, my friend, and it is not too friendly now to——"

Crack! A staff fell sharply on the front of the nearer rostrum, and "Places! To your places!" cried a shrill, commanding treble. It was Babetta's; the child had perceived my difficulty and with equal resource had seen how to deliver me from it. "March, Herren, if you please!" And crack! crack! the staff falling on the front of the rostrum gave weight to her order. "Places!"

You may take it from me that I was not behind hand in obeying. I shook off my business friend and in a twinkling got Hauser between us. The Bishop, placed on the other side of him, and perforce divided from his bargain, made an attempt to continue the discussion across the Knight's crupper.

"My ham, my ham!" he began, but I would not listen and Hauser cut him short. "Have done with your ham, Fichte!" he growled. "The Princess has her eye on you! Have a care!" and seeing that this was the fact Herr Fichte subsided, grumbling.

Thank heaven, a moment later the trumpets sounded high, in honour of the Grand Duke's arrival. He mounted the rostrum behind me, and took his seat, attended by

two or three of his gentlemen. His opponent, the Court Physician, with a great show of humility, ascended the other rostrum, but did not venture to sit down. The Duchess and the old Gräfin, with several ladies, chose to sit on the sward beside the board.

A Court official bade all be silent, and a kind of Master of the Board, armed with a wand as long as a salmon rod, took his stand at the right-hand end of each rostrum. Apparently his business was to pass on the players' orders, and if need be, to hasten the pieces' movements with a touch of his rod. The trumpets sounded a challenge, the lists were opened, the mimic tournament began.

I knew that all that I should be called upon to do was of the simplest. But between the heat and my excitement, I was extremely uncomfortable. All sorts of untoward accidents rose before my mind. What if I made some stupid blunder and was ordered to unmask? Or what if the real Chemnitz, whom I supposed to be locked up in some distant room, escaped and put in an appearance—as damnably unwelcome as the ghost in Hamlet? Or suppose I were to faint with the heat? Or—and now, there! There was Hauser my ally and dependence gone from me—moved two squares to the front, leaving my flank unprotected!

By and by I should be left alone, commanded by eyes on every side. I wondered if my boots were visible. They were of English make, they might betray me. Or there might be some formality, usual when a piece was moved, which I in my ignorance might omit!

And, confound it, the piece that masked me in front was gone also! Presently I should have to move, half a dozen spaces at once, half across the board, perhaps. And how should I acquit myself? Could I do it with the trained step, the stiff bearing of the drilled pieces? I waited—waited nervously for the word of command, fearful lest I should fail to hear it, apprehensive that I should attract notice in some way.

I stared straight before me, wound up to move. And oh, how hot it was! And how oppressive the silence between the moves!

CHAPTER IX

And—all but Checkmate

And the ignominy of it! If anything could add to my confusion of mind it was the sense of the false position in which I had been so weak as to place myself. For, now that it was too late, now that I could not extricate myself, I was convinced that I ought to have run any risk rather than submit to this wretched travesty, detection in which must cover me with ridicule.

I recalled the ripple of laughter which had stirred the embassies from Naples to London when poor Drake had fled across Germany disguised in a green poke-bonnet and a woman's pelisse. I remembered the volley of jests, of cartoons and pasquinades which had hailed about his unlucky head, and even the "Poor devil! *C'en est fait de lui!*" with which I had dismissed him from future employment.

And here was I, with that warning before my eyes—here was I, but a short six months before, a British Minister accredited to a first-class Court—sneaking about a chess board in a disguise still more ludicrous and absurd, obeying orders and tapped on the shoulder by the wand of a miserable Jack in livery!

No wonder that with these reflections I lost my head at the moment when I needed it most. The order for me to move was given; I failed to hear it. It was repeated violently, and tap, tap, down on my head fell the scandalized wand, while from all sides "Move! Move, Herr Roche. Don't you hear, Dummer? Move, Chemnitz!" Injunctions in all forms rained upon me, completing my confusion.

Shade of Perceval Ellis! Virulently was he avenged in that hour. I started at last, but in my haste I tripped and all but fell over the skirt of my dress. Pulled up by it, I lost my place, and did not know where to go; and it was only when a clear childish voice, rising above the

grumbled objurgations, shrilled "Four to the front!" that clumsily and lamely I executed the move.

I had done it now! I had called attention to myself with a vengeance! I heard on one hand an angry exclamation—that the knave was drunk; on the other a growl—that the fool was ill. For the moment I felt all eyes upon me and I awaited what was to come.

And heaven knows what might not have come of it, if in the nick of time luck had not intervened to save me. The trumpets blared anew, there was a cry of "The Prince! The Prince!" and in a moment all eyes left me and were turned in curiosity on the august arrival.

I and my scrape were forgotten, and I had a moment's respite. I collected my scattered senses. I could afford to make no more blunders, that was clear.

I had a glimpse of Davout, the clear brisk little man, as he passed, a few paces from me, along the side of the board, to pay his court to the Duchess and her ladies. His white gloves and his white breeches gleamed, his epaulettes and sword-hilt glittered in the sun—he was fine enough. But I felt too that he was real, terribly real!

I perceived, and I am sure that I was not the only one who perceived, the harsh contrast between his steadfast presence and this mimic court, this mimic war! Between his firm tread and the flaccid pretensions on which he politely but firmly intruded. He passed behind me, and mounted the rostrum; I could no longer see him.

But I could fancy that the easy benevolence, the long mild face and quaint pigeon-wings of the Grand Duke, made but a poor show beside him, and that even in the breasts of the Grand Duke's subjects there must be some searchings of heart, as, awed and intimidated, they eyed this strange phenomenon, this master of their masters.

There was here no one to cry "Vivat Schill," no one to speak for the Vaterland, no champion of the vast invertebrate Germany. But surely, here and there, in the subservient watching crowd, there must be felt some twinge of misgiving, some pang of shame, some feeling of distaste. The Master of their Masters! Of Prussia! Of Germany! Ay, the Master of all—under his Master.

But if this was so, nothing bore witness to it, no one

dared to voice it. After a moment, "Proceed!" cried the Master of the Game. "It is the *wohlgeboren Hofarzl's* move."

The Court Physician moved. The Grand Duke moved in his turn—moved, and moved me. But this time, strung to attention and nerved by Davout's presence, and the urgency of the peril, I kept my head. I behaved as others. And the next move—oh, joy—removed me from the Board.

A red Knight captured me, and with what dignity I might and a sigh of relief I joined the "taken pieces," who in an orderly motionless line formed a red and white fringe along the left hand side of the board, where our presence added to the picturesqueness of the scene.

I was thankful for the respite, and my spirits rose. But the crux remained. I had still to pass the gates and the sentries. I had still to escape from the town, and for some time to come suspense must be my portion. My place in the line happened to be opposite to the spot where the Duchess sat, and I had leisure to observe her; and as I watched her slowly waving her fan and now and again languidly murmuring a word to her ladies, I was tempted to believe that she had forgotten my plight.

Babetta, too, at play behind her and now skipping over her rope, now tossing back her ringlets as she expressed a shrill and free opinion on a move; it was hard to believe that the child had a care in the world, harder still to suppose that she had the eye of a hawk for whatever might affect the *Engländer* whom she had taken under her protection.

But I had presently proof that I wronged them both. I saw the child lean over to her mother, and "Oh, dear, dear!" the Duchess exclaimed, in a voice audible across the board, "How hot those poor Castles must be! That one opposite; he very nearly fainted just now. Who is he? Herr Chemnitz? Well, poor man, tell him he may go. And Herr Hauser—his vizor must be stifling." Then to an attendant, "Tell Herr Chemnitz and Herr Hauser they may go. His Highness permits."

The servant brought the message to us and I suppose that the permission was not unusual, for no one expressed

surprise. With a low obeisance we fell out of the line. Hauser made a sign to me, and when we had retired a few yards we made a second obeisance. Then we turned, and side by side, as quickly as our masquerade and our skirts permitted, we walked towards the entrance gates, which stood near the extremity of the Terrace, and about a furlong from the chess board.

The Duchess's bold stroke, while it had relieved me, had also surprised me. I had thought to pass the gates, one of a crowd ; now that it was to be done in the company of Herr Hauser only, I felt the pinch. I appreciated, perhaps a little too clearly, the risks. What if the sentries stopped us ? Or compelled us to unmask ? Short as was the distance we had to cover, I had time before we reached the gates to wish that the Duchess had not interfered, but had left us to pass out with the others.

I wondered what Hauser thought of it, and as we climbed the steps to the Terrace, " Suppose that they ask us to unmask ? " I suggested. I could see the gates and between them a smudge or two of bright colour, in sharp contrast with the lace-work of russet boughs that overtopped the wall.

" Ach ! " he answered with German phlegm. " We will hope not, *mein Herr*. I came in with Chemnitz. Why should they ? "

" But we are going out, not coming in."

" So ! " he answered, and that was all.

I could only hope that he was right. The gates were of fine iron-work in a frame of the same, and above them the Grand Ducal flag floated idly. Between them I could look down the vista of the cobbled street flanked on either hand by the green shutters of clean substantial houses.

And how heartily at that moment I wished that my feet were safely on those stones. There were four sentries, two in the uniform of Zerbst, two in a French cavalry uniform, green, with red revers. They faced one another and it was necessary to pass between them.

As we approached, " Herren Hauser and Chemnitz," my companion announced, and coolly paused to exchange a word about the game with one of the German sentries. Perforce, I, also, stood, cursing his easiness, and fuming at

the delay; while the two moustachioed Frenchmen standing on the other side of the gate, looked us over, and grinned from ear to ear.

And truly in all their campaigns it was unlikely that they had ever seen two stranger figures. A moment and Hauser prepared to move on—I, too, with a sigh of thankfulness. We had, indeed, as good as passed the barrier, our feet were actually on the street, when the blow fell.

"*Halte-là*," cried the nearer Frenchman, and let his gun-butt fall noisily to the ground. "*Il faut vous démasquer, messieurs!*"

Heavens! I had not a word to say, nor an idea what to do. The worst had befallen us and I stood helpless, tongue-tied, manacled in that accursed dress of mine. And it may be that it was better so, for my companion rose to the occasion with admirable aplomb.

"Ach!" he said. "But not for us! We are townsfolk, playing for His Highness's pleasure and free of the gate. Let us pass, my friend, and no jokes."

But the second Frenchman, he who had not challenged us, barred the way by levelling his gun-barrel before us. "*Démasquez vous, messieurs!*" he commanded. "It is an order."

"But not for us," Hauser persisted stubbornly. "Hartel here knows us. We are townsfolk. Natives of Zerbst, see you."

The German confirmed him. "I know the Herren," he said. "It is right."

But the Frenchman did not give way. Instead "*Plus de mots!*" he grumbled harshly. "I say it is an order, and we—we obey orders or it is the wooden horse for us. *Peste!* Are we here to be laughed at?" And he muttered something which sounded like "German pigs!"

"Oh, well, very good," Hauser replied, but his voice was no longer steady. "I'll unmask. But my friend here, he cannot unless he undresses in the street, and it is"—fumbling with the strings of his helmet—"it is not what do you call it?—*convenable*. A respectable tradesman in his own town! I tell you there will be talk of this, Herren."

"Then there will be talk!" the Frenchman growled. "I obey orders and what do I care. Have we fought our way across Europe to be bearded by a——"

"Herr Chemnitz! Herr Chemnitz!" The hail came even as I hesitated, stricken dumb by the ignominy as well as the danger of my position—came from the gardens behind us, and we turned—thankfully. A flying figure, light as gossamer, with floating curls and billowing skirts, was racing towards us. It was Babetta, and at her heels a leaping dog and a panting attendant, who was loudly but vainly protesting. "Herr Chemnitz! Herr Chemnitz!" the child repeated, and beckoned to us to await her.

When she came up she was out of breath, and for a moment she could not speak. But her presence changed the atmosphere. The German sentries sprang to attention, slapping their butts and standing rigid. "Her Highness, the Princess!" ejaculated Hauser—in a tone of unmistakable relief. And at the word the French sentries came also to the salute.

"Herr Chemnitz," Babetta announced, as soon as she had recovered her breath—and with an imperious little hand she waved off her scandalized attendant, "your Anna is to come to the Schloss to play with me at one o'clock. Do you hear? Her Highness permits!"

"I, in the highest degree, honoured am," I murmured. And I bowed as low as my disguise permitted.

"Bid her bring her hoop," the young lady commanded. "And see you go quickly and send her. She will need to dress, it goes without saying."

"Immediately, if Her Highness so honours her," I replied, and I bowed again. "I hasten to her."

She waved imperiously to us to go, and we turned. The sentries, still standing at attention, no longer barred the way. We moved off together, Hauser and I, keeping the middle of the road, and even swaggering a little.

"Colossal!" Hauser muttered. "She is an Angel Child."

"It was a near thing," said I. But my coolness was the merest pretence. As a fact, all my desire at the moment was to wipe my brow.

"*Gott im Himmel!* She has the true German wit!" he swore, enraptured.

"In excelsis!" I agreed thankfully.

"Ach! You say well, in the Highest indeed. But there, there, they are not as others," reverently. "How should they be, being born? And now, listen, Freiherr. We are clear of that, thank God, and in a moment I leave you. But a space before you reach the bridge and on the right hand is an alley little frequented. You will do wisely to step in there and take off that dress. Then on to—but you have your directions?"

"To Puckler's. But I have no hat."

"Better hatless than headless," he rejoined dryly. "We part here." And to my surprise, without so much as a backward glance or a word of farewell, the man turned his hobby's head from me and stalked into a shop. He had behaved with splendid courage, and I would gladly have thanked him as he deserved. But he gave me no chance.

I suppose that he was as glad to be rid of me as I should be glad when the time came to be rid of my hated disguise, and perhaps for all his phlegm he was not unshaken. At any rate that was how we parted, and I saw him no more. But I drink to his memory. Hoch! For a German, a man of very nimble brain.

I walked on down the quiet sleepy street, and though here and there a stray French soldier stood to gape at the strange figure I presented, no one accosted me. Presently I saw the bridge before me, and choosing an alley at random, I left the street. I suppose it was the right passage, for it was untenanted, and hidden from observation by a sharp turn I tore off the abominable covering under which I had suffered so much both in body and mind.

Freed from its folds, I flung it down in a corner, and oh, the relief of that moment! But I dared not linger, and with the welcome air cooling my heated brow I returned to the street and, hatless indeed, but otherwise presentable, I strode on to the inn by the bridge. I saw a man standing in the entrance to the yard. He was whistling and I made up to him.

He did not wait for me. Making an almost imperceptible sign he turned back into the yard, and I followed. Within the gates a chaise and four stood ready for the road, the postboys in the saddle. The man opened the door of the carriage and without a word beckoned to me to enter.

I did so, he closed the door, clapped his hands, and we moved out of the yard. In a trice we were crossing the long wooden bridge, the clear waters of the river shining beneath us, here broken by a brown sail, there stemmed by a floating mill. The horses' feet ceased to drum upon the resounding planks. We took the road.

I looked back many times but I saw no sign of pursuit. The chaise was shabby but the horses were strong and fresh, and the postboys had some countersign, or perhaps word of our coming had been sent before us, for at the Prussian frontier-post with its black and white pillars we passed without even a check.

Again and again I looked back, but the road remained empty behind us. At Posdorf we changed horses, but I dared not, hungry and faint as I was, stay to eat, and it was not until we reached Belitz, still some thirty miles from Berlin, at five in the afternoon, that I broke my fast. Even so an hour saw me on the road again.

And oh, the relief it was to awake from that bad dream and to be one's self again! To stand next morning, once more Francis Cartwright of the British F.O., at the windows of the very same suite in the Hotel de Russie by the Schlossbrucke, that I had occupied five years before at a time when the Embassy in the Linden was preparing!

To escape from the nightmare of the last three days and the shifts and disguises and inglorious expedients to which I had been driven and at which I now shuddered, and to stand on my own feet ready to face whatever of danger or difficulty still awaited me! For at last I was in Berlin, and beyond Berlin my thoughts did not yet pass—sufficient for the day, I told myself.

Indeed, as I turned from the windows to the table spread English fashion in my honour, and prepared to fall to with an appetite, even the dark prospect that faced

me at home lost half its terrors. Viewed through the sunshine of this fine, this exhilarating autumn morning, all things seemed possible. I reminded myself that I must be man enough to bear what my own folly had brought upon me and—*faire bonne mine à mauvais jeu* !

Not that I was not grateful. Not that when I thought of my gracious and generous countrywoman and of dear little Babetta's wit and courage I did not do so with a full heart, and long for the time when I might make some acknowledgment. Acknowledgment ? I could make none equal to the occasion, indeed, but if there were still smugglers at Hamburg or at Varel, if Heligoland still stood, then English toys and band-boxes of Bond Street millinery should not be lacking !

Still, my gorge rose at the false position in which I had placed myself and the risk of detection I had run ; and, never again, never again, I determined, would I be so weak. One Drake was enough. I might share, I probably should share his disgrace. But I would run no second chance of becoming, like him, a laughing stock.

At the Berlin barrier I had taken a high tone, announcing that my business was with the Danish Ministry on behalf of His Highness the Grand Duke of Zerbst. I should be found if needed at the Hotel de Russie. That, however, was the last subterfuge, if it was one, to which I had stooped.

At the hotel I had presented myself in my own name and demanded my old suite. The night attendant, a former acquaintance, had received me respectfully, though, I saw, with profound astonishment. He had gone to rouse mine host, and he, too, though he had been in some degree prepared, had stared at me as at one risen from the dead.

"*Mein Gott !*" he had exclaimed, the candle shaking in his hand as he held it up to view me the better. "It is as Johann said."

"To be sure, Herr Jäger !" I had replied. But I had been a little dashed by a surprise that seemed to exceed the circumstances. "I would like to have my old rooms if they are unoccupied."

He had shrugged his shoulders. "There are few

occupied in these days. We are a city of the dead. The rooms are at His Excellency's service and Johann shall light a fire at once. But——"

But I had no thought now save of bed, and I had cut him short, bidding him light me to the rooms ; I had been many hours on the road, I told him. And still as he obeyed me, and stood to superintend the kindling of the fire, I had caught him stealing furtive glances at me, and I had known that a question trembled on his lips.

But I had jumped to the conclusion that the presence in Berlin of that *rara avis*, an Englishman, sufficiently accounted for his stupefaction ; and dog-tired as I was by all that I had gone through since morning, I had dismissed him as cursorily as was consistent with good manners.

I was soon to learn, from another mouth, that the good fellow had a more substantial and a much stranger reason for his surprise than any of which I had knowledge.

CHAPTER X

Lost!

I KNEW it to be of prime importance that I should be in touch with the Danish Minister before the Prussian police or their French masters moved against me, and half an hour after nine saw me leaving the Russie. I had but a short distance to walk, but I saw enough in that brief space to convince me that this was not the Berlin I had known.

The city's one good point, its State buildings, remained; but they seemed in their new and rather garish magnificence to be at greater odds than ever with the meanness of the shabby streets and low roofs that clustered beneath them. Traffic was sparse, trade appeared to be stagnant, depression reigned on all faces, the very carriages seemed to be, were that possible, more ramshackle, and the harness a little dingier than of old.

On a city never beautiful but once aspiring, the victor had set his heel with a vengeance; and such prosperity as his exactions had not crushed, the absence of the Court, still in exile at Konisgberg, had sapped.

Only in one place did I see, as I passed along, shunning rather than seeking notice, anything like animation. About one house in the Unter den Linden, and but a block or two from the Danish Mission, there was coming and going enough. A sentry in a blue coat and red trousers paced to and fro before this house, and through its doors an incessant stream of callers—soldiers, civilians, messengers, officers—was continually in passage.

Over the door, flaunting its gilded plumes in the sunshine, an imperial eagle stretched its beak and spread its wings—for this was the French embassy, and within its walls I could fancy Daru and St. Marsan lolling in their chairs, while German princes waited in the anteroom until it should be the pleasure of French generals to receive them.

Truly a wonderful sight to one who had known the old Berlin, its braggart air, its swaggering army, its

traditions of victory, its memory, all-pervading of the Great Frederick ! A sight to move and to astonish ! It brought home to me as nothing else had, Jena and Auerstadt, those crushing defeats—ay, and the slender basis on which all military power rests.

But it may be believed that I did not stand before that house and gaze. I passed it with averted face, hurried on to the Danish Mission, and sent in my name. Only then did I breathe freely or feel myself at liberty to indulge my curiosity. From the safe haven of the doorway I had the French house still in sight and could discern, through the thinning foliage of the limes, the gleam of the golden wings and the stir of the crowd that moved beneath them.

And as I gazed, myself withdrawn from sight, I witnessed the commotion caused by an arrival. I saw the crowd part suddenly asunder, and a carriage drawn by four smoking horses whirl up to the door. From the carriage, amid much parade and excitement, there alighted four men, wearing cloaks over their uniforms. They entered the house, and in the first to pass within, flanked on either hand by bared heads, by salutes, by ceremony, I recognized Davout !

I had reached a place of safety only just in time !

I turned back into the hall, and immediately became aware—my sight-seeing had taken up no more than a minute—of a stentorian voice heaping one exclamation of surprise on another. " Bring him in ! Bring him in ! " I heard, and the next moment the messenger to whom I had given my name came hurrying out to me. " His Excellency will see you at once, sir," he said, and went before me into the room.

Dear old Bronberg ! As huge, as hearty, as burly as ever, yet hiding under his booming and bellowing personality almost as much finesse as benevolence. " Wunderbar ! Colossal ! " he cried. " It is ! " And laying his hands on my shoulders he kissed me soundly on both cheeks. " Cartwright, by all the powers returned to life ! "

" To be sure ! " I said, moved by the cordiality of his reception, yet already feeling the awkwardness of the

explanation upon which I must enter. "Here I am, Baron, at last!"

"And Ellis? Perceval Ellis?" He looked expectantly towards the door which the messenger still held ajar. "Is your chief not——"

"Ellis?" I exclaimed.

"Yes. He is with you, I suppose?"

I stared. What did the man mean? "Perceval Ellis?" I repeated. "With me?"

"Why not? If one, why not the other? Why," gazing at me with all his eyes, "what's the matter, man? Why do you look like that?"

"But Perceval Ellis?" I stammered. "Ellis is in England, Baron—this ten weeks."

"The devil he is!" he exploded.

"But of course."

"Then all I can say," the Baron roared, and I saw the blood rush to his face and his eyes snap, "your people have given me a devilish lot of trouble for nothing! In England these ten weeks? Do you mean it? *Donner und Blitzen*, man! If that is so, what does your pretty Government mean by—mean by——"

"But isn't it so?" I struck in, staring feebly at him. "Did he not come through Berlin in August—the first week of August, and go on to England?"

"To England! Without you?"

"Yes."

"No, he didn't!" he bellowed in his bull voice. "No, he didn't, or there are more liars in your country than I believe in! No! No, no, no! He didn't! And if he is not with you now, the devil knows where he is! *Gott im Himmel*, haven't I interviewed half the German nation and written a pile of letters this high—this high about him and about you? Haven't you both been given up for dead—haven't you both been lost this two months, and half the embassies and all the police and *der Teufel* knows who besides, been driven out of their senses to find you? And Talleyrand—that subtle devil!—writing, and Duroc! And has not the whole country been ransacked to find him—and you? And you walk coolly in with a smile on your face and want to make me believe—

why, man it would try the patience of a saint ! What does it all mean ? What's at the bottom of it ? Where is he ? Where is he, man ? "

" Before God, I don't know," I said, my head whirling. " I did not know that he was lost. I supposed him to be in England—these many weeks."

" Then why are you here ? Why are you here, man ? If he is in England ! Were you not together ? "

" I can explain that," I said, wincing. " We parted at Wittenberg, Baron."

" When ? "

" The last day of July."

" And he went on—without you ? "

" Yes." I wiped my brow.

" And you ? "

" It is a long story."

" Well, in heaven's name, man, let us have it. Let us have it ! It is time I am sure. Let us get some glimmer of light in this worse than Baltic fog. *Gott im Himmel,* when I saw you come in at the door I supposed he was with you, and there was an end of it ! And glad I was, my friend, I can tell you, for the bother I've had with this. But there, wait ! wait ! "

He touched a bell and to the messenger who entered, " I am not to be interrupted, do you hear ? " he said. " Not for an hour, if it is Count Hardenberg himself ! I see no one. And hark you, don't let anyone know that this gentleman is here. Let us see where we are," he continued as the door closed, " before we commit ourselves. This is the strangest thing I have known for many a day."

" I am completely in the dark," I said.

" Well, you can tell me your story, at any rate. We can get that. And that may throw light on the rest. So you parted, eh ? At Wittenberg ? Well, how was it ? And why ? Better begin at the beginning, man."

" Yes," I said. " I will. You shall know all that I know, Baron. But it never even occurred to me until now—when I have it from your mouth—that Perceval Ellis did not reach England three months ago. You really tell me that he did not ? "

" Haven't I told you—over and over again ? " he

roared in his great bull voice. "He has not been heard of since the first days of August, I tell you—when the earth opened and swallowed him as far as I can hear! But tell me your tale and may be we shall get some light at last." And he wiped his brow with a handkerchief as big as a lug sail.

I told him then what I had to tell; the story, step by step, but more briefly, which I have here related. He stopped me now and again that he might jot down a date, but otherwise he refrained from comment, though an occasional grunt of surprise bore witness to the interest with which he followed my adventures.

I knew as I told the tale, knew only too well, that I did not come well out of it—that the part I had played in leaving Ellis must appear in his eyes unfavourable. But he made no remark on this, and the shock that this news about Perceval caused me, and the curiosity I felt to learn the facts, rendered me less tender on my own account and less susceptible to his criticism.

When I had done, "And you come now from Zerbst?" he said.

"I left Zerbst at noon yesterday."

"And Davout?" He gave way, despite himself, I think, to a bellow of laughter. "You gave him the slip, you funny dog, *en tour à échecs*! Ho! Ho! You funny dog, you! *Mein Gott*, it was well thought of!"

I nodded, my face hot. I saw that I should never hear the last of that game of chess.

"And you in no danger, had you known it, my lad! Why, I tell you, he is as keen to get to the bottom of this as we are. His people swear they know nothing about it, and meantime they are getting the credit of shooting you both in the ditch at Magdeburg for the sake of the despatches you carried! And on the top of the d'Enghien case and the Rumbold and the Wagstaff business they don't like it! They are as sore as a mangy dog. A bad name and nothing gained, all the stink and no despatches, do you see? Do you see? I'm told that the Emperor has written in his own hand and rapped M. Daru pretty smartly over the knuckles. Of course if they had got the despatches it would be another story."

" But are you sure, Baron, that they have not got them ? " I put in.

He nodded, with a knowing look. " Well, yes, I am sure." he said. " I think I am sure, my friend. If they had got them, more than one would have heard of it and been sorry—always supposing there was that in them which I suspect there was. No, they have not got them, or they are cleverer than I think them, and I think M. de Talleyrand the devil for cleverness. No, my friend, I am pretty sure that they have not got them. And a man who should know better than I is equally sure. And that is Justus Grüner."

" Justus Grüner ? " I echoed. I did not know the name.

" Was he not in your time ? The head of the Prussian police." He looked at the door and lowered his tone. " He has the name of being devoted to Daru ; he would not hold his office another day if he had not. But "—he looked meaningly at me—" I can trust my Justus, see you, my friend, and between me and you, he is confident that they have not got them. You shall see him to-day, and tell him your story. I will arrange it."

" In the meantime," I said anxiously. " I have told you my story, Baron, but I am in the dark as to yours. Perceval Ellis and I parted at Wittenberg. I suppose that something is known of his movements after that ? I left Klatz the messenger with him, and also Kaspar his servant. Have they, too, disappeared ? What of them ? "

" We have them."

" Oh ! "

" They are both in the hands of the police—here in Berlin."

" But did they not tell you that I——"

" Had left Ellis ? They did ! " the Baron roared, and he struck the table. " They did ! And we did not believe them. No one did ! No one believed them ! And that was one reason—there were others, of course, but that was one—why they are still in charge. They have been examined and re-examined, and always that has been against them.

"But I'll tell you the whole story; I have the précis here. The précis? Why, *Potztausend*! we have drawn up a hundred, if we have drawn up one. We've kept our quill-drivers at work for days and days at this! We've covered reams with it. Your Foreign Office has given us no rest over it, and my lord, Herr Ellis's uncle—uncle is he not?—pheugh, there's a man! But the précis—here it is, and here are the facts. Where shall I begin? Well, I'll begin here. Listen to this:

"The British envoy lately accredited to Vienna, travelling with his suite, passed, it is certain, through Berlin on the second day of August. He was provided with Prussian passports in the name of Herr Eils, and his passage is proved by the fact that a person exhibiting those passports was supplied with a relay of horses upon the demand of the landlord of the Hotel Parlement d'Angleterre.

"But the travellers appear to have been anxious to avoid observation, so that no one acquainted with their persons is able to speak to their separate identities, though the hotel-keeper is clear that one wore a handsome fur cloak which he noticed because the day, though wet, was warm, and he drew the conclusion that the wearer was an invalid. A gentleman believed to be the Envoy called at the Danish Ministry, but in the absence of Baron von Bronberg declined to leave his name.

"It is ascertained that the party left Berlin about four in the afternoon, but it is thought that one or more of the travellers entered the carriage as it passed through the streets; this it is supposed for the purpose of avoiding observation. They arrived at Spandau at seven, but instead of going to the principal inn, the Rothen Adler, they stayed at Koch's inn, which being the stopping place for the stage wagons was crowded.

"The inn-keeper, who has been repeatedly questioned, is able to state the following facts: that two gentlemen sat down to supper together and that the taller and darker of the two, who appeared to be also the superior, seemed to be in a nervous and fidgety state; that he supped—the inn has only one common room—in his fur cloak, and that by turning up the collar, on the pretext that the

room was draughty, he concealed his features as far as possible from the people about him.

" The servants of the inn differ as to the number of attendants who were with the party, but the better evidence appears to be that there were two. The travellers let it be known that they were merchants returning to Hamburg, but their appearance and their desire for privacy left the impression that they were other than they gave out.

" On the last point the Postmaster at Spandau remembers that before leaving in the morning one of the travellers appeared to be in favour of going on with a pair of horses only, but that the wearer of the fur cloak, supported by the Postmaster's statement that the road was sandy, overruled him and the full team was taken on.

" Their intention, as given out, was to reach Perleberg that day, but it is believed that the principal traveller was seized with illness. At any rate on the arrival of the party at Kyritz in the afternoon he announced that he would stay the night. Unfortunately, the Black Eagle, where they stopped, was in a commotion owing to the presence of a detachment of French infantry, which had halted there on its march from Stettin to Hanover.

" Very little therefore can be learned of the movements of the party, but it has been ascertained that the two principal persons were forced to share one room and on the pretext of illness kept themselves so close that it was only with difficulty—when inquiry was made five weeks later—that they could be traced.

" However, there is evidence that the sick man's companion was anxious to proceed next morning, and that something like a dispute arose.

" Eventually they stayed over the day and towards evening the invalid was sufficiently recovered to descend, and he and his friend took their supper at a table which they shared with two women travellers who had just arrived. This was impressed on the memory of the attendant by a special incident.

" As the gentleman in the fur cloak sat down and opened his napkin, he let fall a slip of paper. The waitress was beside him. She picked it up and returned it to him,

and it was the agitation into which the sight of this paper threw him that brought the party to her mind. She remembers that he rose to his feet as if seized with illness and as abruptly resumed his seat; and that then, like one taking a resolution, he placed the paper in his companion's hand.

"He, too, appeared to be much agitated. The elder of the two ladies, a handsome woman about thirty-five—her companion was fifteen years younger and also attractive—made more than one effort to enter into conversation with them, but in vain—the travellers appeared to be so completely engrossed by the appearance of the paper."

"It was Klatz, of course," I said, "to whom he handed the paper."

"No doubt it was. I understand that now."

"And the paper—there is equally no doubt—was a warning, similar to the two of which I have told you."

"No doubt."

"But now that we are again on Klatz, I wonder, Baron, I really do wonder," I objected, "why with so little evidence of my presence with the party, you did not accept his story—that I was not there."

"So, to be sure!" The Baron leant forward and tapped me on the knee to ensure my attention. "Well, I will tell you. For three reasons. First, there was always a cause for the lack of evidence of your presence—the crowded inns, the shyness of the party, the disorder on the roads—the thing was always in doubt.

"Secondly, if you were not there, and if your disappearance was not due to the same cause that accounted for Perceval Ellis's—where were you? Why did you not come forward?

"See, my friend? You did not appear, neither in Germany nor in England. Ergo, my dear fellow, we argued that, dead or alive, you and Perceval Ellis had disappeared together. And thirdly—thirdly—we had another reason for distrusting Klatz, which I will come to by and by. For the moment let me continue. Where was I? At the departure from Kyritz, was it not?"

"Yes, Baron, but one moment. The postboys?

They must have known and been able to tell you how many were in the party ? "

" Just so, my friend," with another tap on the knee. " Just so. And doubtless they did know. But we have them not. The two that rode from Berlin to Spandau left Berlin a week later under contract to go to Konigsberg, to the Court, and they are believed to be at present with the Queen at Petersburg. At any rate, they are lost in the eastern fog. From Spandau to Kyritz the lads who rode that stage went off with the French detachment, taking their master's horses with them, and they cannot be traced. Justice would much like to trace them—and the horses ! Then from Kyritz to Perleberg they had one postboy only, riding the leaders—a volunteer who offered himself at the last—the Postmaster was short—and who disappeared with poor Ellis."

" Disappeared ? " I exclaimed. " No ? "

" Ay, disappeared—with Ellis. No more trace to be found of the one than of the other."

" But that's very singular," I said. " Was the man a stranger to the Postmaster ? "

" He was—a complete stranger. A man—but don't let this prejudice you—" the Baron shook his head with a smile—" in the French postilion service. Or he had been."

" The French——"

" Postilion service. Yes."

I sprang to my feet. " The devil he was ! " I cried. " Why, that man, a man in a French postilion's uniform, positively haunted me—haunted me during the last two days I was with poor Ellis."

" You noticed him ? "

" Repeatedly."

Bronberg nodded thoughtfully, but after a moment's consideration shook his head. " Well, if we had known that," he said, " we could not have done more than we have to find him. The other postboys could have had nothing to do with the catastrophe and search for them has been more or less perfunctory. But for this man, who was on the scene at the vital moment, the hue and

cry has been strict. Not only have the most strenuous inquiries been made, but a reward of 200 thalers has been offered for his discovery."

"That should produce him," I said. And I sat down again. "Well, so much for that. But I've led you astray. You were leaving Kyritz for Perleberg?"

"Yes. They left Kyritz about seven or a little later. The road you know? It is infamous. It is one of the worst in Europe, if you can call it a road—sandy, heavy, unpeopled, the hamlets sparse and miserable, the inns wretched hovels! It is all sand and pine-woods, sand and pine-woods, and here and there a melancholy lake hemmed in by trees or a sluggish arm of the Havel winding through the woods and to be forded thrice in the hour! Oh, d—n it, I have travelled that road a score of times both ways, and it is still a nightmare to me! Well, on that road there is no trace of them until we come to Perleberg. They arrived at Perleberg an hour before sunset, and here, at Perleberg, every movement that they made has been traced, followed, examined, scrutinized—every movement! For if anything is certain, my friend, it is that into Perleberg your countryman drove about six in the afternoon of that day, and out of it, so far as human intelligence can determine, he never did go!"

"Then he is there now!" I cried, astonished at the Baron's vehemence.

"Yes, alive or dead. Alive or dead! God knows which!" The Baron wiped his brow.

"And someone else knows, too, I suppose?"

"Ay, more than one probably. More than one," darkly.

"Yet you are sure that the French——"

He shook his head. "No, the French did not do it. I tell you so. Nor do the French know who did it. I have reasons for being sure of that, which I will tell you by and by. Of course at first we were all inclined to lay it at their door. They had a motive, and they are not—" with a glance at the door—"to say the least of it, scrupulous. But no, it was not they, my friend, in this case."

"But perhaps the Prussian police—at their bidding?"

"No, nor on their own motion. I am quite sure of

that, too. I can trust my friend Justus. They do not know, they, too, who did it. The truth is if the ground had opened and swallowed your Chief at nine o'clock that night he could not have disappeared more completely or left fewer traces behind him. Oh, it is a puzzle, a very great puzzle, my friend. Colossal ! And the trouble it has given me ! I sweat when I think of it ! " He passed his huge bandanna over his vast smiling face. " Colossal ! " he repeated. " A puzzle ! "

CHAPTER XI

Who Did It?

"Yes," I answered thoughtfully, "it seems a most extraordinary thing, Baron, if, as you say, every effort has been made to find him." Later, alas, sadder and deeper emotions, sorrow and remorse, were to be mine, emotions stirred by the part I had unwittingly played in the matter; but for the moment I felt only perplexity.

"But you haven't told me yet what did happen at Perleberg," I continued.

"No," he replied, "that is what I am going to do, my friend. You know Perleberg? Have passed through it, probably? Small quiet town on the Mecklenburg frontier; a cobbled Market Place, over-big for the town and here and there grass-grown, in the middle a statue of Roland, on one side the Cathedral. Two streets, divided by the Rathhaus, leave the Market Place at the far end; in one of these streets is the principal inn, the 'Golden Crown,' in the other, the second-best inn, the 'German Coffee House.'

"From the nearer end of the Market Place one broad street runs out to the Post House, which is on the road from Berlin to Hamburg—the road skirts but does not pass through Perleberg. Opposite the Post House is a third tavern, a ramshackle place of middling reputation, though at times travellers put up there by reason of its situation.

"Well, that's Perleberg—a Cathedral, a grass-grown Market Place, three streets, three inns and a Post House—add a few lanes and alleys and you have the whole. Well, the carriage arrived at the Post House about six, but Perceval Ellis was not in it. He had alighted—this is agreed—some fifty yards short of the Post and had gone into the town. He asked his way to the house of Captain von Kalisch, the Governor, who lodges next door to the Rathhaus at the corner of the street in which is the German Coffee House.

"He found Kalisch at home. He at once disclosed to him—he was in a state of great excitement—who he

was and his nationality. He stated that he was being followed, that he had received repeated warnings, and believed himself to be in imminent danger. He proposed to stay the night and he requested that a guard should be furnished for his protection.

" The Governor was taken aback. The request and the circumstances were out of the ordinary ; he was a Prussian official, and he had no instructions. He was at first for refusing. But he saw that his visitor was labouring under great excitement and he took time to consider. He examined the stranger's passports, and at length, being convinced that he really was—astounding as it seemed—a British envoy *en voyage*, he consented to his request, and sent two soldiers down to the Post House.

" He is by way of being a gentleman, Kalisch, and seeing that his visitor was suffering from cold as well as from nervousness, he sent for some hot tea and insisted on him drinking a cup. This after some pressing Ellis did, but the Governor noticed that his hands shook so violently that he used both to raise the cup to his lips. About half-past six Ellis left and walked down to the Post House. You follow that ? "

" Yes."

" Kalisch lays much stress on his condition. He had all the appearance, he says, of a man who had not slept for several nights and was haunted by presentiments of evil. He even goes so far as to say that he would not have been surprised if the stranger had done something rash."

" Rash ? "

" To himself."

I stood up impetuously—and sat down again. " Absurd ! " I said. " Inconceivable ! Ellis was the last man, even if he had not been in a position of responsibility —the very last man to do such a thing ! "

The Baron nodded. " Yes," he said, " I am with you there—absolutely. I think that Kalisch, looking at things by the light of what followed, has exaggerated his impressions. I am sure that we may put that aside, and I proceed. Ellis, on arriving at the Post House supped with one companion in a small room in which were supping two Jew merchants, who were also on their way to Hamburg,

and who were still in the house some hours after his absence was discovered.

"About half-past seven the gentleman was observed by a girl, a servant at the Post House, to be examining his pistols, apparently to see if the priming was in order, and from this arose the idea of suicide. A few minutes later, entering the room again, she found him walking up and down, in an excited state, and talking to himself.

"At eight he appears to have suddenly changed his mind as to staying the night—it is possible that it was only then that he learned that there were no sleeping rooms at the Post House and that he would have to remove into the town; at any rate he went to the room used by the postilions and ordered horses to be put to his carriage—he would go on. On that the man who had conducted the party from Kyritz——"

"The Frenchman?"

"Yes, if he was a Frenchman, objected, and angry words followed, but Ellis persisted, and after some to-ing and fro-ing, for it would appear that he changed his mind more than once, final orders were given for a start at nine o'clock. Ellis then went out to the sentries, and giving the men a *douceur* told them that they were no longer needed. He sent his thanks by them to the Governor and informed him that he was going on that night."

"Would to God I had been with him!" I exclaimed, deeply moved by the picture of poor Perceval, alone, distraught, and aware of his peril, but unable to see whence it threatened. "Where was Klatz all this time?"

"After supper? In and out, he says, until about half-past eight. At half-past eight he went into the town on an errand of his own. He says that when he left the Post House, Ellis was walking up and down beside the carriage, which was standing in the road before the Post House, and between it and the 'Black Cow,' the tavern on the opposite side of the way.

"The carriage had not been unloaded and after sunset a woman, the wife of the Postmaster, undertook to watch it. Later she was called away and deputed the task to her son August, a young man of a reputation on a par with that of the 'Black Cow.' August admits that about

a quarter to nine, seeing the traveller in the fur cloak standing beside it, he stepped away and when he returned at five minutes to nine the carriage was unattended.

" At the same moment—or as nearly as can be fixed—Klatz returned from the town and seeing that the horses were not attached went into the yard to learn the reason. He found that the postboy was not there ; he had been missing, the ostler said, for twenty minutes. Klatz went into the house to tell his master but could not find him. He looked into the carriage, fancying that he might have seated himself in it and gone to sleep ; but he was not there. And from that moment to this, my friend—with one doubtful exception—your friend Perceval has not been seen by living eyes—so far as we can learn."

" A very strange story," I said, drawing a long breath.

" Yes, yet as far as we can learn, a true story."

" He was last seen then, standing by the carriage at five minutes to nine—in the dark ? "

" Yes, it was dusk at any rate—and we are told a cloudy evening."

" And August who saw him last is—suspect ? "

" A *vaurien* ! A bad character ! Beyond doubt. Moreover, when search was made later and the Post House was ransacked, a thing that was at first believed to be Ellis's, and that certainly was purloined from the party, was discovered hidden under some sacks in an outhouse."

" No ! " I cried. " What was it ? "

" A fur cloak."

" But does not that bring it fairly home to August ? "

" To the Post House at any rate ? Yes, apparently. But wait a moment. The two Jews were in and about the Post House until fully two hours after Ellis's disappearance. They are respectable men and we have their evidence, and they are certain that nothing could have happened to Ellis at the Post House without their knowledge. Then the story August tells seems to be probable.

" He says that later in the evening he looked into the carriage and saw the cloak lying on the seat, was tempted by its value, and took it. But he denies strenuously—he is still in custody—that he did anything to Ellis or has any knowledge where he is or what happened to him.

Moreover Klatz and Kaspar both assert that the cloak is not Ellis's but yours."

"Ah!"

"But as we believed that you had disappeared with Ellis this did not remove the suspicion. Now, however, as you were not there, it looks still more likely that August is telling the truth."

"Yes," I admitted. "But, Baron when you said a few minutes ago that August was the last to see Ellis, you added 'with one doubtful exception.' What exception? It may shed some light."

"It does, if we can be sure of the facts. I'll tell you. The Governor's landlady has a daughter, a respectable girl. She took in the tea that afternoon and saw Ellis and is able to describe Ellis's dress. She says that he wore a fur travelling cap and a fur cloak, open, over a short laced grey coat and grey trousers, with a diamond brooch in his shirt or stock. Now she says that at nine that evening—the cathedral clock was striking at the moment—a tall man wearing a cloak with the collar turned up called and asked to see the Governor. She told him that Captain von Kalisch was not at home; he was at a ball given that evening by the provincial nobility at the 'German Coffee House.'

"The visitor turned away without replying, and she fancied went round the corner in the direction of that inn, and she thinks that he was joined a few paces from the door by a man who came out of the darkness about the Roland statue. But she is not certain that the caller was the Englishman who had been to see Kalisch earlier in the evening and had taken tea. There was no light in the passage, the only lights were two oil lamps in the market place and they were behind the visitor. Consequently his face was in deep shadow, and she can only say that he wore a cloak and appeared to be about Ellis's height."

"Still that is evidence," I said.

"Yes, and I think with the girl that it was your friend. Indeed, we concluded that the person who joined him was no other than yourself. It was not; but any way if it was Ellis who called at the door, that was positively the last that was seen of him."

"Turning as if to enter the street in which is the 'German Coffee House'?"

"Precisely."

"There is nothing to be learned about him at the 'Coffee House'?"

"Nothing! Absolutely nothing. No Englishman called there that night. But there was a ball going forward at the inn, a band was playing, there were many strangers in every part of the house, and much confusion."

"Well," I said, after thinking it over for a minute, "I was certainly not the person who joined him in the Market Place. And to be frank, Baron, as there seems to be an entire want of evidence of my presence in Perleberg, I am more astonished than ever that you assumed it. Especially as Klatz and Kaspar were in one story that I was not there."

"You forget the strength of the *parti pris*, my friend. We started with the assumption that Ellis and you were together. You as well as Ellis were missing: hence we believed that the same fate had overtaken both. As a fact, at Perleberg the party were never together except, perhaps, at supper-time: one in, one out—you might have been on some errand in the town. Then the man Kaspar was a stupid, frightened witness, and when he corroborated Klatz, we, knowing something about Klatz, doubted him also."

"It was probably Klatz who joined Ellis in the Market Place?"

"No. We have the Jews' evidence that from nine onwards Klatz was searching for Ellis at the Post House. Klatz could not therefore have been in the Market Place at nine, or moving in the direction of the 'German Coffee House.' Moreover"—and Bronberg once more bent forward and significantly tapped me on the knee—"we hold Klatz, my friend. We know all about Klatz."

"You think so, but——"

"Oh, but we do. We know all about him. He did sell you! He did sell you! You were right there, Cartwright, you were right all along. Klatz did sell you, or rather the despatches you carried—to the French for five hundred pounds."

"No!" I cried, really surprised at last.

"Yes! For five hundred pounds—English sterling!"

"The villain! The d—d villain!" I exclaimed.

"He was a villain. Your suspicions were right. He sold you. But he failed to carry out his bargain. You were to be waylaid in a lonely part of the road and robbed of the despatches. Of course the French wished to do the thing as quietly as possible, and accordingly the first trap was laid for you in a wood near Elsterwerde. But you diverged from the Berlin road and made instead for Wittenberg, and so baffled them for that time. Klatz could not arrange another snare in a moment; your change of route had put him out of touch with his employers, and not all places were suited to so delicate a business.

"However, another rendezvous was arranged, at a quiet spot on the farther side of Kyritz. But again Klatz's plan was dislocated. Ellis's illness deferred his departure from Kyritz by twenty-four hours—you will remember that Klatz remonstrated—and when the party arrived at the place, the trap was not set. Justus Grüner has got to the bottom of all that, and the French, confronted with Klatz's confession, have admitted as much and have cynically reclaimed the five-hundred-pound bill which was found on him, and which guided Justus to the truth."

"Well, I am d—d!"

"The French, indeed, think nothing too bad for Klatz, for it is their theory—and it is one of the three which cover the ground—that he was a double traitor; that he had another client, and having touched the French money, sold the despatches and his master to a third party."

"The Judas! But do you believe that, Baron?"

"No, I don't. I do not think that the man could have been rash enough to entertain the idea. And—for a second and weightier reason—if he sold the despatches to a third party, where are the despatches? Where are they?"

"Ah!"

"Where are they, my friend?" The Baron nodded twice, his face pregnant with meaning.

"Yes, I see," I said.

"That is the real point. That is the index finger to

the mystery. Where are they? Who has them? For—" his eyes beginning to twinkle—" I suppose without trespassing on your confidence, Mr. Secretary, I may presume that they were important ? "

" Important ! I should think so, Baron ! " I exclaimed.

" And secret ? "

" Most secret."

" Valuable therefore to the French, of course ? We know it."

" Yes."

" Well, I am quite sure that they have not got them. If they had——"

" There would have been trouble before this," I admitted. " Yes, that is so, Baron. I allow it. That certainly seems to be proof that the French have not got them."

" It is. Well, then, to whom besides would they be of value ? "

" To our own Foreign Office, of course."

" Of course. Well, we know that they have not got them ! They have bleated loudly enough about them ! To any third party ? "

" No, I should think not."

" Ah, but think ! Think again, my friend." He looked at me with a queer smile. " What of the—what of the Ball-Platz, eh ? "

I stared at him, and thought hard, while I waited for him to go on.

" What of Vienna ? What of our excellent friends, the late Stadion, and the present Metternich, and the nimble-witted but enthusiastic Gentz ? Your friends ? What if they came to feel that in their desire to maintain a link with your delightful money-bags, and your so powerful ships of war—which, alas for poor Copenhagen, I cannot admit are always well used—what if it struck them that they had put their hands to a little more than on cooler reflection, with the French Army undeniably masters, they deemed wise ? Or safe ? Or safe, my friend ? Might they not in that case conceive the idea of regaining possession—of those so important signatures ? "

I smiled. " It does not arise," I said. " No, Baron. There was nothing in the despatches——"

" Though so important ? Though so secret ? " His face wore a benevolent smile, but his eyes twinkled. " Nothing in them that might render Vienna anxious—to recover them or destroy them ? "

I shook my head, smiling. It would not do for me to admit that. " No," I said, " there was nothing in them as bad—or as good—as that, Baron." I did not suppose that he would believe me, and certainly his suggestion fell in with the facts ; it accounted not only for the loss of the despatches but for the non-effect of that loss.

But I considered it a most unlikely solution, and I was not prepared to give it weight by debating it. " No," I repeated, " there is no way out there, I am sure. I can think of no third party with an interest strong enough to lead them to bribe Klatz—or to murder poor Ellis."

" Then we will rule that out—for the moment," he agreed. " There remain but two theories then. The first is the one which is firmly maintained by Kalisch and the police at Perleberg. It is that Ellis fell a victim to a common robbery, that he was lured from the side of the carriage—possibly in the darkness no more than thirty or forty yards—and was murdered by vulgar cut-throats who, finding the papers upon him, destroyed them in ignorance of their value.

" The suspicions of the local people fixed themselves on the tavern opposite the Post House. They searched it most closely and with some success, for they found buried under the cellar floor a skeleton. But it was certainly not Ellis's, as it was plain that it had lain there for some years ; and for the rest no trace of anything belonging to him could be found there. But a stream runs near, and there are pinewoods within ten minutes' walk.

" The stream was dragged, and the woods were beaten without result. But such a search must be perfunctory ; the ' Black Cow ' is not the only suspicious house in the town, and the failure to find the body has not convinced the local police that they are wrong."

" I see."

" But on the whole I prefer the third and last alternative—the one held by Grüner and the Berlin police, and incessantly and vociferously proclaimed by Klatz."

" And that is ? "

" That Klatz was not the only one in pursuit of the despatches ; that there were others hunting *à la même piste*, who had the advantage over him that they were aware of his operations while he was in ignorance of theirs ; that the warnings given at Grossenhayn and Kyritz were given by them, with a view to spoiling his game, and that at Perleberg Ellis fell into their hands."

I paused to consider the suggestion. Someone tapped at the door. The messenger who had introduced me put in his head. " In five minutes," the Baron said.

" Yes, I allow, Baron," I said, " that that would account for many of the facts. But it is open to the objection you stated before. If Ellis fell a victim to a scheme, the object of which was to obtain the despatches, and to sell them to the highest bidder—where are they ? "

" Just so," he said. " And that was why I—" he looked blandly at me—" suggested the Ball Platz. If Vienna recovered them it would only be to destroy them."

" But don't you see, Baron," I remonstrated, " that you are accusing Metternich of a monstrous thing ? Of the murder of an envoy accredited to his own Court. Of an infamy in fact ! An unspeakable treachery ! "

" No, no ! " protesting with arms flung wide. " No, no, my friend, do not put that on me. Because, do you see, he might be only the purchaser—after the event."

" I don't believe it," I said positively. And I meant it. " I'll never believe it, Baron. We are not, really we are not as bad as that."

" Well, perhaps not," he answered, but I could see with some doubt. " Perhaps not. Only you see the hypothesis meets the facts as far as we know them. And putting it aside there remains only the local theory—that Ellis was the victim of a casual crime."

" Then whence the warnings at Grossenhayn and Kyritz ? "

Bronberg shrugged his shoulders. " I give it up," he said. " It is a puzzle, a great puzzle, my friend. But do you meet Grüner here at three. I'll send for him, and we'll see what he says about it."

CHAPTER XII

The Chief of Police

As I walked away from the Mission, I might, no doubt, if I had used my eyes, have seen more than I had already remarked of the change for the worse which had come over Berlin. But my thoughts were not of Berlin, nor of our French friends whose door I passed blindly, nor even of Bronberg whose door I had just left. Nor did they as yet range among the several theories that the Baron had propounded.

They were of Ellis. And they were, God knows, very bitter and very sad thoughts. For it is true that the faults of the dead fall from them, their virtues remain in our minds, and Perceval had been my Chief, and with all his trifling affectations an honourable English gentleman.

And it was a picture of him, pacing to and fro in the darkness beside the lonely carriage, with a fate more obscure than the night already enveloping him—a picture of him, alone, deserted, distracted, trusting no one and with no one to trust, aware of his danger yet ignorant of the quarter whence it threatened him—this picture it was, and the gloomy and remorseful reflections which it called up, that gripped and tormented my mind, as I walked through the unseen streets.

For my eyes were opened, and I saw, and saw with bitter regret, what I had done. We had been bound together by all the ties of the service. We had lived side by side for weeks, we had shared many an hour of work and some of cordial companionship, we had been friends after a fashion. And then with danger ahead, in the teeth of clear warnings and of my own apprehensions, I had left him to face the peril! In a moment of irritation —and how petty, how unworthy seemed its cause now I looked back—I had abandoned him, I had deserted him, and consigned him to the fate that I now felt certain had been his.

In Bronberg's presence I had hidden my feelings,

though already they had tormented me; but now that I was free to think, it seemed to me that I could never make up for the past, never hold up my head again, never put off the burden of self-reproach.

For I was sure that had I been with Ellis, this would not have happened. Together we could have borne with ease a burden too great for one. Together we could have stood back to back, and baffled this miserable scheme. And at least and at worst he would not have spent his last hours alone and unsupported, watched only by alien eyes and entangled in the unseen toils that he knew to be closing about him.

And why, I asked myself, had I deserted him? Why had I abandoned him—and my duty? Alas, for reasons so small and so petty that I could not recall them without shame, nor formulate them without humiliation! Poor Ellis! Poor Perceval! How could I face his wife, his family, his friends—and tell them the tale?

It was a most wretched hour that I spent, wandering through the Thiergarten, heedless whither I went, and blind even to the change caused by the removal of the Chariot and Horses from the Brandenburg Gate. I saw only the mean Post House at Perleberg, and the dark road before it, the shapeless bulk of the laden carriage, and beside it, pacing distractedly to and fro, the figure of my friend, the friend whom I had abandoned!

But if I could not save him, at least I might avenge him. And slowly, as I passed along in sorrowful meditation, that thought took possession of me. I might avenge him! And the despatches? It might still be possible to undo my error there. They were lost, but they might not be lost beyond finding; and to recover them were it practicable, were it possible, was the only reparation I could make.

True, what the Prussian police and their French masters had failed to find, it was unlikely that I could find. But I might try; it was my duty to try, and with so strong, so overwhelming an inducement as moved me, I might succeed, and in doing so might also avenge Ellis's death.

The thought gave me some consolation. For a moment

it lifted the dark cloud, and I fell to considering the four theories which, according to Bronberg, exhausted the facts. The first—that the French had obtained the despatches, I discarded ; it was clear that had they seized them they would have used them.

They would have demanded the dismissal of Metternich and taken other steps ; and I had the Baron's word that they had taken no such steps. The second alternative—that the Ball Platz had taken fright and manœuvred to recover them, I could not stomach. I knew the Austrian Ministers well, and I could not think so ill of them.

Then for the theory of a casual robbery which the complete disappearance of the papers seemed to support ? It failed in one point. It did not account for the warnings against Klatz. Those warnings, if they were, as seemed likely, given by the guilty party, pointed to something deeper and more deliberate than a casual *guet-apens* having for its object a diamond brooch or a fur cloak.

So there remained only the fourth alternative—that Klatz in the pursuit of the papers had had his rivals who had succeeded where he had failed. This theory also had its difficulty, in the complete disappearance of the despatches. But inasmuch as it implied that the authors of the crime were also the authors of the warnings, given at Grossenhayn and Kyritz, it was tempting, since it provided at least one clue ; the conspirators or someone acting for them must have been at these places and also at Perleberg at the time Ellis was there.

I cast my thoughts backwards. Could I recall anyone ? Anyone who had been at Grossenhayn ? And also at Kyritz, according to the story.

At Grossenhayn ? Of course, the French-dressed postilion ! The very man, beyond doubt, who had vanished at Perleberg ! Of course ! In the excitement of the moment I stood and, heedless of observers, I struck the tree I was passing a resounding blow with my cane.

Two ladies who were walking down an adjacent *allée*, divided from mine by a row of trees, glanced at me, surprised by my sudden action, and their astonished looks recalled me to myself. As they passed on, the

younger glanced back, and our eyes met a second time. Plucked sharply from my thoughts, I recognized her.

With astonishment, for unless I was much mistaken, she was the girl of the courtyard at Wittenberg, the girl whom I had seen starting at daybreak from the door of the "Golden Stag." If so, the face turned to me was also the face of the portrait—of the Grand Duchess's governess, who should have arrived at the Schloss two days before! A strange coincidence, I thought, as I stood gazing after her and her companion. Two men were strolling a few paces behind them, who might or might not be of their party, but otherwise they were alone.

And stranger coincidence still! I had been thinking, when the girl passed, of the French postilion, and now I remembered that the woman with whom she had departed from Wittenberg that morning had been the very woman whom I had seen a day or two earlier travelling in a carriage conducted by that very postilion.

By Jove! But it was not that thought that after a moment's startled reflection led me to turn and follow. It was partly curiosity, the desire to view the girl more nearly, and to learn if the attraction which her portrait had possessed for me attached to herself; and partly the idea that I might through her, more speedily than through the post, convey to my kind friend the Duchess the news of my safe arrival in Berlin.

The two women were walking quickly, and by the time I had made up my mind they were at such a distance that the intervening trees hid them. But once I had started, I gained on them, and on the two men who seemed to belong to them, and by the time they reached the Brandenburger Thor I was not more than thirty yards behind them. The Unter den Linden was moderately crowded, though not with the well-dressed crowd of other days; but having them now well in hand, I slackened my pace to consider how I should explain my intrusion. And then suddenly I missed them.

A moment later I picked them up again; they were hastening down an alley in the direction of the Schlossbrucke, and I made after them, not without a suspicion that they had observed me following them and were

evading me. But though I mended my pace, I was only just in time to see them turn into—of all places—my hotel.

There was no longer need of haste, for they could not escape me now, and it would be more seemly, if they were staying in the house, to send up my name. I entered, and a little within the entrance I came on Herr Jäger. I asked him if a young lady of the name of Mackay was staying there.

He shook his head. "*Nein*," he said. "Not to my knowledge, sir."

"She has just entered with another lady," I explained.

"Ah? With Frau Waechter, then, it must be. There is a young lady of her party, I remember."

"They are staying here?"

He shrugged his shoulders. "For the night only. They make an early start to-morrow."

I reflected then that if I sent up my name, Fräulein Mackay would not know it, and "If you will tell me where their rooms are," I said, "I will go up."

"That is easy. They are on His Excellency's corridor, the last suite on the same side. Not our best rooms, but—" with a deprecatory gesture, "for the night only."

"Thank you, Herr Jäger," I said. "I have a message which I wish to send by the lady. That's all."

He smirked. "A charming messenger," he said, "*Ein schönes Fräulein!*"

I did not reply but went up the stairs. The hotel, like most of the houses in Berlin, covered much ground, being of two storys only. My suite was the one next the head of the staircase, about the middle of a long corridor, which ran both ways—a wide passage bare and pink-washed, with here and there one of those faded daubs of frescoes, trellises of vine-leaves and grapes and the like, with which the Germans delight to adorn their houses.

I turned into my bedroom to brush my hair and settle my stock, and then proceeded hat in hand along the corridor in search of the strangers' rooms.

I found that the last suite did not open directly on the corridor, but lay back and was approached by an entry a few feet deep. This entry was dark as well as narrow, and the first thing I did was to stumble over some

article of luggage left in it ; so that, as far as heralding a caller went, my knock, executed after I had suppressed a cry of pain, and nursed my shin, came late.

Perhaps for that reason, it was promptly answered. The door opened. The person who opened it was a woman, and that was all I could see, for the window was behind her and I could only guess from her height and outline that she was the lady I had seen in the girl's company.

" A thousand pardons, madam," I said, with my best air. " I beg you to forgive this intrusion. But I think that I recognized in the young lady with you just now——"

" My daughter ? "

" No, but—" with a little hesitation—" if I have made no mistake, Fräulein Mackay—of Zerbst. I must needs seem impertinent as I have not the honour of her acquaintance, but I believe that she is on her way to the Schloss, and——"

" There is no one of that name here," the woman said, cutting me short. Her tone was abrupt, not to say harsh.

I stared, a good deal at a loss. I had been so certain of the recognition. " But, madam, one moment," I ventured. " I think——"

" Of the name of Mackay, you say ? No, I know no one of that name. And I am busy, sir. More, I have had to complain before of persons following my daughter in the streets—and if I am again to be troubled in this way——"

" Oh, but," I said, thinking this a little too strong. " I assure you that this is nothing of that kind. Of course if I have made a mistake, and the young lady is not Fräulein Mackay, I offer you my most sincere apologies. But unless I am mistaken——"

" You are mistaken," she replied, rudely. " Completely mistaken, and your apologies, as they occupy my time, sir, only make it worse. I wish you good morning ! " And the woman shut the door in my face.

I confess that I sneaked back to my rooms, feeling rather small. Could I have mistaken the suite ? But no, Herr Jäger's directions had been precise. And the height and the figure of the woman, as I had seen her silhouetted

against the window, tallied with those of the Fräulein Mackay's companion. No, I had made no mistake—unless it was in my recognition of the girl. Of course if I was wrong in that, some annoyance on the mother's part was reasonable—young men will at times follow pretty girls and seek their acquaintance in offhand ways.

But it seemed to me that there had been something offensive in the woman's manner; something that, as I dwelt upon it, awakened suspicion. She had been so very quick to repudiate the Fräulein Mackay's presence, so very rude in repelling my overture! And had I really overheard—at some stage in the interview but I could not say at what stage—a low cry, as of surprise, in the room behind her? Yes, now I thought of it, I felt sure that I had, although at the moment, my attention taken up with the woman, I had paid no heed to it.

However, the matter, if annoying, was of little moment, and even if the girl was Fräulein Mackay and her companions chose to deny her to a stranger, it was no business of mine. I had other and sadly more important things to deal with, and I sighed as they flocked back upon my mind. I had wasted enough time on the girl and had indeed been a fool to meddle where I was not wanted.

I had ceased from the moment of my meeting with Baron von Bronberg to trouble about my personal safety. But when I left the "Russie" to keep my appointment with him I happened to look back and I noticed that I was followed by a man whom I had seen a little earlier standing opposite the hotel. The fact did not alarm me, for I felt that I was safe in the Baron's hands. But I kept it in mind.

I found the Baron in talk with a middle-sized man, sallow and flat faced, with bald temples, and a close secretive mouth. He was not a man of pleasant aspect, but Bronberg seemed to be on easy terms with him. "This is my friend, Herr Oberst Offizier Grüner of the Berlin Police," he said. And after the exchange of a few formal phrases, "I have told him all you have told me, Cartwright," Bronberg continued, "and it interests him, but it does not alter his point of view."

"It confirms it," Grüner said laconically. He had a

way of speaking with his eyes lowered which gave no clue to his thoughts.

" In what way, Herr Grüner ? "

" I am clear, *mein Herr*, that the parties who assaulted and searched you near Dessau were the same who later disposed of His Excellency."

" Yes, I think so myself," I said. " It seems likely."

" It is certain. Having made sure that the despatches were not on you, they followed your Chief and the day and a half he wasted at Kyritz enabled them to come up with him at Perleberg."

The Baron nodded his big head. " Grüner is right," he said. " That was the way of it, no doubt."

" And the fact is proof," Grüner continued, his eyes still on the floor, " that the despatches were their object."

" But are you quite sure, Herr Oberst Offizier," I said, " that it was not Klatz who——"

He showed his teeth in a close smile. " No, it was not Klatz," he said. But he seemed to be unwilling to say more.

" Yet if their object," I argued, " was the despatches and they obtained the despatches—this should make itself plain in one way or another ? "

He raised his eyebrows.

" You cannot explain that, Herr Grüner ? "

" No, If I could——" He shrugged his shoulders.

I confess the man puzzled me, and annoyed me. I felt myself brought up against his reticence as against a wall. I tried another line " You have no doubts of Captain von Kalisch ? "

He shook his head. " No, sir, none."

" And the girl's story—that she saw His Excellency in the town at nine o'clock ? Is that to be trusted ? "

" She believes it, but——" He shrugged his shoulders.

The Baron laughed his big hearty laugh. We amused him. " Our friend, Herr Grüner—I am going to be quite candid, *mein Herr*—has a difficult part to play, Cartwright. He is head of the Berlin police. but——"

" Better not," said the other.

" Well," I cried, rather warmly " if you will not trust me, Herr Oberst Offizier, I must take my own line, and

I have already determined what that must be. I intend to look into this myself, and I shall go to Perleberg for that purpose. And make my own inquiries on the spot."

"Impossible," he said. "Out of the question."

"Why?"

"Because my orders, sir, are that you leave the country by the shortest road and without an hour's delay."

"Oh!" I exclaimed. This was a blow indeed!

"We can allow you four days to cross the frontier—under escort."

I was very angry. "But this is infamous!" I cried. "You murder my Chief and—Baron," I turned impetuously to him, "I must apply to you. You must—you are bound to protect me."

But the Baron, toying with a paper knife which he had taken from the table, only looked grave. "I am afraid that Grüner is within his rights," he said slowly. "And I am afraid, too, that he is wise, my friend. To begin with, I do not believe that you could effect anything or discover anything. And you would be running a risk, and I think a considerable risk, for nothing. For consider, if our friend here with his network of agents, his many connections and his power of control cannot get to the bottom of this mystery how should you—a foreigner and single-handed, my friend? Frankly, it is out of the question—it is absurd!"

"But I am determined to try," I said.

The silent man shook his head.

The Baron also shook his big bald head. "You might try," he said. "And if that were all, though you would certainly fail, no harm would be done, Cartwright. But that is not all. What the Oberst Offizier means is that he does not want——"

"And is not going to have," Grüner put in sourly.

"Another disappearance and a fresh scandal. It is his duty now to see you safely—safely, my friend—out of the country. And I am afraid that he is determined to do it."

"But he might send an agent with me," I remonstrated. "That would effectually secure my safety. You do not

suppose that the villains who murdered poor Ellis would dare to come into the open again and murder me ? "

" It is not of them I am thinking," Grüner muttered, his eyes on the floor, " though there is risk on that side."

The Baron nodded. " Yes," he said. " Perhaps a good deal—if they thought that you were on their track. But it is not of them, Cartwright, that our friend is thinking. I will tell you what is in his mind. Suppose that by some wonderful turn of good fortune you recovered these precious papers—of which I confess I am sick of hearing ! Will that suit Klatz's employers ? Have you thought of that ? "

" The French ? "

" Just so," said the Baron, with his eyes on the door.

Grüner shook his head in reprobation of the other's candour. " This is waste of time," he said, " just waste of time, Herr Baron. This gentleman must be at Hamburg in four days. That is my last word."

" Yes, I am afraid that that is the last word, Cartwright," Bronberg agreed. " Grüner means you well—he means you well, I assure you, but I can understand his anxiety to see the last of you. Now that you are found the Prussian authorities are responsible for your safety, and circumstances might arise, if you did what you propose, which would make their task—embarrassing."

" You mean," I said bluntly, " that they could not protect me from the French. Very good. I agree. I don't want to see the inside of Magdeburg fortress more than another. But "—firmly, for I had by this time set my heart on this search, seeing clearly that it was by that way only that I could set myself right with the Office and with Ellis's family—" there is a way of avoiding that peril. I will go to the French Embassy, now, myself, and I will see Daru or St. Marsan—whoever is there in fact—and I will demand a safe conduct. If only to clear themselves they must give it me. If I obtain that, surely Herr Grüner cannot refuse."

" Useless ! " the policeman muttered curtly.

" I fear so," the Baron agreed. " It is not St. Marsan or Daru you have to fear. It is the underlings who are here to do the dirty work, and who will know how to

evade even Daru's orders. You fall in with a squad of mounted *douaniers*, or a handful of French horse crossing the country; and what care they for the Intendant's safe conduct? They have had a hint and a handful of thalers, may be, and piff! You disappear! That is all! You disappear! And, aware of that possibility, Daru, you may be sure, will not be so foolish as to commit himself. He will have had word—from Talleyrand may be—*c'est là, le diable!*—and he will stand mum chance. He will simply and politely refer you to the Prussian authorities. He will say—I can hear him saying it with his dry smile—that he could not presume to issue a safe-conduct within the Prussian dominions."

"Then what am I to do?"

"Go home—by the shortest road!" said Grüner.

"Well, I'm hanged if I do!" I replied angrily. "No, I'm hanged if I do!" I repeated, uplifted by an idea that had suddenly come into my head. "If it be useless to apply to Daru, I will go to one whom at any rate your *douaniers* and your French horse will respect—or he falls very far below his reputation! He is in Berlin now, he has just arrived, and I will see him. I will tear aside this web of flimsy pretence that stifles us! I will get his safe conduct!"

"Whose?" The question was Grüner's. He looked up—for once. I had excited his curiosity.

"Davout's!" I said. "Davout's! The Prince of Eckmühl's."

Neither of them spoke.

"Do you mean that that will not avail—to protect me?" I cried, looking from one to the other, challenging them.

For the first time the Prussian's eyes met mine. He even smiled—grimly, but he smiled. "Possibly, if you could get it," he said.

"I will get it. You don't think that I shall?"

"No," he replied. "I am sure that you will not."

"Well, at any rate, I can try," I said. "And I will try." I took up my hat.

CHAPTER XIII

At the French Embassy

But with the French Embassy before me and no more than thirty yards ahead, I was shaken by a spasm of doubt. An embassy is extra-territorial, and I knew that once across the threshold I stood on French soil. If, then, upon no matter what pretext, my hosts chose to detain me, it might not be easy for Bronberg, it might not be easy even for the Prussian authorities, to reclaim me.

But some risk, I reflected, I must run, and I judged that the *affaire* Ellis had made too much noise in the world and been too publicly *affichéd* for even the agents of Talleyrand to venture on a fresh outrage at this moment. I went on.

The bustle which centred about the Embassy had impressed me when I had gone by it that morning, but it struck me more forcibly now. For it was evident that something of note was passing. Twenty paces from the house a squadron of *chasseurs à cheval* sat cloaked and motionless in their saddles, their shining helmets and nodding plumes in sharp contrast with the russet green of the autumnal trees.

Facing the door, a couple of troopers, their carbine-butts on their thighs, their horses drawn across the roadway, gazed stonily before them; and between them and the entrance half a dozen led chargers, held by as many orderlies, tossed their heads and jingled their bits. On the steps stood a score of officers and civilians, and fringing the wall of the opposite houses a long line of idlers gazed sullenly on the spectacle; on which also from every window in the neighbourhood pale, curious faces looked down.

It occurred to me that I had come near to missing, if I had not missed, my opportunity, and I hastened my steps. Forgetting the qualms which I had felt a moment before, I pushed boldly through the group on the steps and entered the hall. A porter in a gorgeous livery placed

himself before me, but with the air of authority that custom confers, I waved him aside.

"The Prince of Eckmühl?" I said, *sans façon*. "He has not started yet? Good! Tell him, if you please, that Mr. Cartwright, *Secrétaire de la Mission Britannique, accredité auprès de la Cour de Vienne, ex-envoyé Extraordinaire auprès de la même Cour*, desires leave to speak with him."

Astonished, the man was going to reply, but I waved him away. "At once, if you please," I said. "It is important that I should see M. le Maréchal immediately."

My announcement had been extraordinary enough to impress the man, and my manner completed the work. He beckoned to an underling to take his place while he himself vanished up the wide staircase to do my bidding.

I caught the murmur of surprise to which my announcement had given rise, and I was aware that I was the object of all eyes and of much whispered comment. But I was not unaccustomed to that, and could bear it. Presently an officer detached himself from one of the groups about me, and approached me courteously. "I trust," he said, politely, "that the safety of his Excellency M. Ellis, whom I had the pleasure of meeting in Vienna, is also ascertained?"

"Alas, monsieur," I answered, "I regret to say that that is not the case. It is in his behalf that I am here and desire to see the Prince."

"I regret. I fear that he is at this moment on the point of starting to Magdeburg," he answered. "Still it is possible—ah! Here is the Prince." He stepped back hurriedly as the Marshal, attended by a brilliant cluster of officers, appeared at the head of the stairs.

I stepped forward, recognizing that this was no time for misgivings or for diffidence, and that all now depended on myself. Fortunately the diplomat, however young he may be, has a sense of his own importance—or he were not fit to represent his sovereign—and is not easily abashed. He has talked with kings, he has met on terms of apparent equality men whom the world names with awe—and he has learned that they are much as other men.

In the days when he was First Consul I had talked with the great Napoleomagne, as the Germans called him, had watched the play of his pale, classic features, listened to his harsh voice, and silently criticized his lack of manners. And I now summoned the remembrance to my aid.

Davout descended slowly. He was cloaked to the feet, the heel of his scabbard slid from step to step behind him, and looking up I had time to consider him. He had not the face of a soldier, rather the look of a physician or of some staid business man, sagacious, firm, not wanting in benevolence—so little does the man at times match his reputation.

Of the ruthless disciplinarian, the dogged, unsparing fighter, the commander for whom no responsibility was too great, there appeared not a trace, and he looked far more British than French, and on the surface anything but formidable. But I knew him to be, descending that staircase, the virtual master of Prussia, as he had been its conqueror, and when half-way down the flight his eyes met mine, I felt the sudden silent thrust of his personality.

A man also cloaked, but in black, with a couple of orders peeping from his breast—M. Daru, I fancied, late the Intendant-General of Prussia—was talking in his ear as he descended ; and the Marshal seemed to be giving silent attention to his words. But Davout's eyes, once they had met mine, did not quit them, and when he reached the foot of the stairs he advanced a step in my direction.

" Are you the gentleman who sent in a request to see me ? " he asked.

" I am, M. le Prince," I replied. " If you will be so good, I need detain you but five minutes."

Daru's eyes intercepted mine. He smiled an ambiguous smile that reminded one of his master, Talleyrand. " Unfortunately, my dear sir," he said smoothly, speaking for the Marshal, " the Prince is on the point of starting for Magdeburg. He has commissioned me to see you in his stead and after his departure. I shall then be at leisure to learn, M. Cartwright—M. Cartwright, is it not ?—what is the object of——"

" My application ? " I bowed. " Unfortunately—I

much regret it—it is one which I can make only to the Prince in person, as it is he only who can grant it."

"You are bold, young gentleman," Davout said, "since to hear you I must needs detain all these gentlemen. It should be an important matter to warrant that."

"It is a matter of the first importance, Prince," I said, firmly—for I saw that in another moment I might be put aside. "It touches the honour of the French administration here, and the honour of him whom M. Daru and you alike serve."

"Ha!" His eyes searched mine, but I did not give way. "You crow loudly," he said, "considering all that I know! But there, I will hear you. Five minutes. Follow me."

He led the way, Daru accompanying him, into a small waiting room beside the hall, and a servant at a sign from him closed the door upon us. Davout laid his plumed hat on the table and turned to me. "Now, sir," he said, taking out his watch which he held in his hand throughout the interview, "What is it? But first—" he fixed me with eyes as cold as steel that in a moment lent an expression wholly different to his face—"let me be clear. Am I speaking to Mr. Cartwright, late the envoy—so-called, for I do not admit the regularity of the appointment—to Vienna? Or am I addressing the gentleman who some months ago at Wittenberg violated the hospitality of Prussia by joining in a public place and to the general scandal in incitements to treason? Yes, to no less, sir, with a riff-raff of brawling students and childish conspirators?"

"To Mr. Cartwright of the Austrian Mission," I replied. But the hit was a shrewd one and my face burned.

"That is well—very well, for you, sir," he replied severely. "For I tell you frankly that had you fallen into my hands in that other capacity I should most certainly have made you amenable to the laws of war—to those laws between nations of which you showed yourself oblivious. As it is—what do you want?"

"Marshal Davout's safe conduct, while I inquire on His Britannic Majesty's behalf—and my own—into the

fate of my friend and Chief, Mr. Perceval Ellis, of whose disappearance on Prussian soil and in possession of Prussian passports, you have doubtless heard."

"You have no need of my safe conduct," he said harshly. "M. Daru here can——"

"M. Daru," I said bluntly, "cannot give me the same assurance of safety—in all circumstances—which the Prince of Eckmühl can. Of course, Prince, if this were a question of a private person or of the disappearance of a private person, I should not presume to approach you. But the honour of France and of the French administration is in question here."

"I deny it!" Daru said forcibly.

"M. Daru may deny it," I retorted, "but these matters are regarded differently by civilians and soldiers. And I am appealing—I own it—from M. Daru to the Marshal of France. I am assured and I am personally satisfied that the French authorities have had no part in this tragedy. I believe them, I honestly believe them, to be innocent of it, as things turned out. But the only way to make that innocence clear to the world is to allow me to make my investigation and to afford me protection while I make it. I speak too bluntly, perhaps? But I have lost, M. le Maréchal, a dear and attached friend, and my sovereign a useful servant. And that in circumstances which, if the matter be not cleared up, must reflect upon the French nation—and the Emperor."

"I deny it!" Daru cried again. "I deny it altogether" I saw him touch the Prince on the arm.

But Davout did not heed him. "What do you want to do?" he asked sternly.

"I desire to go to Perleberg and there to make inquiries on the spot, sir."

"But I understand that the Prussian police have investigated the circumstances."

"Without solving the mystery. Moreover their report will not have the same weight with my Government as a report made by me after a thorough investigation."

"Your Government!" As he spoke Davout's eyes sparkled with anger. "Your Government, sir! What is it to me? We are at war with it! We owe it nothing

—neither satisfaction nor explanation, nor anything—save cannon shot, sir! It is a false and perfidious one, the begetter of wars, the paymaster of trouble! I hate it, and if the sea did not protect it and your nation of shopkeepers——"

"It would still know how to protect itself!" I said. "But that is not the question, Prince. War is war. But murder, the murder of an Envoy, passing lawfully through the country in reliance on the laws and customs of nations—that is another matter."

"What of Rastadt?" he said, with a gloomy look.

"It was a vile and a wicked outrage, in which my country, at least, had no part. There French ambassadors were foully murdered; here an English envoy has apparently met with the same fate. There the Court of Vienna hastened to make what amends she could. Here it is no question of reparation, but of information. And I say, and I say with the utmost certainty, that if your Emperor were here and this application were made to him, His Majesty would hasten to grant it—since his sagacity would at once apprise him that to grant it would be to risk nothing, while to refuse it would afford grounds for suspicion—suspicion that I have already told you I believe to be baseless."

"You acknowledge that?"

"I do, Prince."

"Then what more do you want?"

"Proof," I replied, standing my ground. "Proof that will convince my Government as well as myself."

He stood silent a moment, reflecting; and Daru would have given much I felt sure to attract his attention. But the Intendant did not venture to break in on his thoughts unasked, and presently Davout struck a bell that stood on the table. "Paper and ink," he said to the man who came in, and he drew off his right-hand gauntlet. "For how long?" he asked, addressing me abruptly.

"A fortnight should suffice."

"I will allow you ten days. That should be enough. In ten days, understand, you will cross the frontier. M. Daru will see to that. And before you leave you will

communicate to him what you have discovered—if you discover anything."

"I will, Prince. On my honour."

He sat down and wrote half a dozen lines, signed them, cast sand upon the writing, and handed it to me. Then he looked at me—much as, I should fancy, a cat looks at a mouse. "I grant your request," he said, "but mark me, young gentleman, and have a care! *Plus de bêtises! Plus be bavardage!* No prying! No observation!"

"I will observe your terms—strictly," I answered. "On my honour, Prince."

"It will be well for you to do so," he riposted. "For be assured I on my part shall do my duty as I always do my duty, and look to others to do theirs. If you deceive me, *je vous ferai fusiller sans façon, monsieur, c'est bien entendu.*"

"Agreed, sir," I said. "And I thank you." And my spirits rising marvellously I placed the precious document in my breast-pocket.

He struck the bell. "You will not halt in Spandau, and you will not approach within ten miles of Magdeburg or Stettin. You understand? Very well." And to the servant, "You will see this gentleman—out."

I bowed and retreated—victorious. And lest there should be any recall, lest that cunning Daru, who was eyeing me with scowling disfavour, should even now get in a word, I hastened to put a hundred yards between myself and the Embassy. Then and then only I breathed freely.

Even so, and though I was not slow to move away, I had a glimpse from a side street of the French cavalcade as it swept, in all the glitter and panoply of war—and unmolested except by the sullen looks that followed it—down the Unter den Linden.

And a strange sight I thought it, my mind reverting to the days, no more than three years back, when countless vapouring officers cocked their hats on the Berlin sidewalks and bragged of the invincibility of Prussian arms; when moustachioed Vons and Barons, elbowing the civilian aside, boasted that happen what might to Russians and Austrians and Italians, the battalions of Frederick were

invincible! Yes, a strange sight, and one that had its lesson for the nations.

The Baron's mighty laugh, as he clapped me on the shoulder and gave me joy of a success that he had not anticipated, was the prelude to a pleasant little dinner—*tête-à-tête*, for the diplomatic circle was with the King at Konigsberg, and even Hatzfeldt's parties—Hatzfeldt was playing the thankless part of Governor of Berlin—consisted in the main, the Baron told me, of Jews and tradesmen.

Poverty prevailed, men were living in garrets who had lived in palaces, and though the French garrison had retired and their generals no longer barracked in the Royal Schloss, or Marshal Victor in the Princess Louise's palace, the French grip still held the city lifeless.

He talked much of this, but after dinner he had a serious word for me. "You go to Kyritz to-morrow then?"

"Yes, I start at seven. I have given the necessary orders, and Jäger is seeing to it."

"Well, Grüner will keep an eye on you, no doubt. And you may trust him, if you have occasion to do so. But all the same, have a care, my friend. And if by any chance you fall on the secret of your precious papers, then above all things have a care. Look to yourself."

I nodded. "Once let me get my hands on them, Baron——"

"Just so! Just so! But still take care! Take care, my friend. Have you pistols?"

"I bought a pair in the Jägerstrasse this afternoon."

"Good. Then keep them about you and keep them loaded, and your eyes open. With that and Davout's passport you should do. But the roads are covered with the flotsam of this unlucky war; every bush holds its thief, and every heath its broken-down soldier. And you'll have need of prudence. Well, *Gott befahlen* and good luck to you."

I parted most gratefully from the good-natured Dane and a little before ten left his house to return to my hotel. But, whether the change was due to the gloomy aspect of the unlighted streets through which I passed or was merely the effect of reaction, I had not covered half the distance before I felt my spirits sink.

I had been successful beyond my hopes with Davout ; I had wrung from him the chance, however desperate, of rehabilitating myself in the eyes of those at home ; I had before me an enterprise which I ardently desired to undertake. And yet, with all this, I fell within the length of a street into a black depth of depression.

Instead of anticipating with zest the early start I was to make, and facing with confidence the chances and changes of the road, I felt a dark despondency envelop me. Young, armed, with Davout's credentials in my pocket, and authorized, Englishman as I was, to lord it in a hostile land, I yet felt in this hour no hope. On the contrary I felt a kind of horror of the desolate leagues across the Mark to which I must commit myself.

I pictured the lonely road winding over the flat heavy sands, now buried in pinewoods, now lapped by lonely water-pools, and I found it an ill-omened road, a road beset by perils, and perils the worse because I could not guess at them. And at the end of the road I had a vision, through what accursed illusion I cannot say, of Ellis's livid distorted face, of his blood-bedabbled breast, of his hair, unkempt and mingled with soil.

It was a strange mood—a strange and unusual mood for me, who am no more superstitious than other men of the world ; and I have never been able to explain it. Long afterwards, looking back on it, I remembered that when the fit possessed me most completely I was walking at the heels of two people, who going my way, loitered in talk, and whom I eventually passed.

At the moment I noticed them so little that had I been asked five minutes later whether they were men or women I could not have said ; but the time was to come when I not only recalled them with something of the horror of that night, but suspected who they were. If I was right, then some strange thing passed from them to me, some emanation of evil that found in the darkness power and in the night a medium. But to believe this—no, in the daylight I do not believe it.

Nevertheless I certainly breathed more freely when I had crossed the threshold of the " Russie."

For here, though the house was very quiet, and I do

not believe that there were a dozen guests in the hotel, at any rate the normal and the commonplace reigned. I lit my candle at the taper in the hall, and went thoughtfully up the shadowy staircase, telling myself that what I needed was a good night's rest, and that in the morning things would wear a more cheerful aspect. I reached the first floor, the echo of my footsteps on the bare boards going before me, and I turned into my bedroom.

I closed the door, and set down my candle on the table. Then, after making some preparations, I put off my boots, and I opened the door to place them outside for the valet to clean. As I did this I glanced down the dark corridor, my mind recurring for a moment to the Mackay girl and the odd episode of the afternoon. Could I have made a mistake, familiar as I was with the portrait? Or, if I had not, and the girl I had seen was Norma Mackay, the Duchess's governess, what was she doing here? With that woman? And when she was already overdue at Zerbst?

I was not expecting anything as I stood there; of that I am certain. But it may be that under the influence of my thoughts my gaze dwelt a moment longer than was necessary on the corridor's end—dwelt long enough for me to grasp that all was darkness in that direction, and that then on that darkness there fell, as I looked, a thin upright shaft of light. I stared, arrested by the sight, and saw the light slowly, very slowly, broaden.

Someone was opening, in that narrow entry at the end of the corridor, a door; was opening it silently, very silently, for the house was as still as death and I caught no sound—and equally slowly, for it seemed to me that a whole long minute elapsed before there shone on the floor and on the opposite wall a patch of light equal to the width of the entry. Then for a moment nothing more happened. Silence reigned. The light shone steadily on the wall.

I waited, my boots in my hand, gazing that way, arrested not so much by the light as by the death-like stillness that attended its appearance. I listened with all my ears, and still not a sound reached me.

CHAPTER XIV

The Shadow on the Wall

But now my eyes detected a change. Gradually, at what precise moment I could not say, the lower half of the patch of light, the half which lay across the floor, was broken by a round blur. A few seconds, and as silently, as stealthily as the light had grown, this shadow within it began to grow.

Slowly it lengthened, slowly it rose; it crept inch by inch up the screen of light, until it broke upon me that that at which I was staring, that which I was watching, was the shadow of a woman who was creeping with infinite care and precaution along the passage, her back to the lighted room from which she had issued. As yet she, or rather her shadow, was visible only from the waist upwards, but her head, her shoulders and her figure were sufficiently defined for me to judge of her sex; and the more easily as she presently steadied herself by stretching out an arm and placing her hand against the wall.

In that posture—and I could fancy her listening with all her ears before she crept farther—she remained motionless for, as it seemed to me, an age. Then, her arm still extended, she came on again. The shadow began once more to steal up the screen of light, and slowly to develop the lower part of the girl's form.

The slow movement, the silence, the darkness which reigned everywhere save where the lighted space held and absorbed the eyes, wrought strongly on the nerves, and I watched, fascinated. Now, surely now, the girl must show herself! She must appear in the corridor! But no, at the moment when her shadow from the waist upwards darkened the wall, while the lower part fell on the floor, she ceased to move.

I divined that she was again pausing to listen, standing just within the doorway of the passage. But not a sound, not a breath reached me. There might have been no living thing within a hundred miles of me. The hotel

about us, with its two score bare, deserted rooms, was as silent as the tomb.

And still her shadow did not alter; she did not appear. She was still listening. And I cannot say why, much less can I describe the degree to which this last pause spoke to me of fear. But it did, and so eloquently, that if I had heard the wild beating of the girl's heart or seen the stare frozen on her face, I could not have been more sure of the fact. Something, I was certain, some movement, some sound, possibly from the room behind, had arrested her, paralysed her limbs, taken from her even the power to cry out.

I was so certain of this, though not a sigh reached me, nor a board creaked, that I could not bear the suspense any longer. I had my boots in my hand, I was in my stockinged feet, and I started to creep along the corridor towards the light. At all costs I would see what was passing in that passage. Something very strange, I was certain.

I suppose that I had taken half a dozen steps when I stopped. For on a sudden and without a sound the girl's profile underwent a change. It became blurred—thickened. Her head and neck still remained clear and defined, but from her waist downwards she was now a thing without form, as if someone had crept up behind her and obscured the light.

Then, as I checked myself, taking in the change, I saw on a level with the girl's neck a grim addition—the dark shape of a huge hand, that with open clutching fingers hovered and groped, as if about to close upon her neck. I gasped—this was more than I could stand! And flinging caution aside, I sprang forward.

But as I did so, the figures on the screen wavered, changed, melted. A second the shadows danced, the next they flitted downwards, vanished! The light narrowed, leapt, it too was gone. A door slammed, and I was left, brought up by the darkness, and still a pace or two from the threshold of the passage.

I hesitated. I had seen an ugly thing, and my first impulse was to go through with the matter, to grope my way down the entry, to knock at the door and demand an explanation. But of what? I paused, considering.

Darkness and silence have a sobering effect, and that which I had seen might, I began to perceive, mean nothing. I might have mistaken the import of it, that which had passed might have passed in jest, and if I acted on my mistake I should be laughed at. Then the girl—surely if the girl had been frightened or had feared harm, she would have cried out or run out. She would have roused the house.

And what after all had I seen? I found it difficult to understand, but the door remained closed, the passage dark, no sound, no cry came from the room. And it was no business of mine. No appeal had been made to me. Presently I went slowly back to my bedroom. I began to undress.

But so strong was the impression left on my mind, so abiding the remembrance of that clutching, claw-like hand, so disturbed was I by the whole thing, that five minutes later I paused in my undressing, half-minded to go out, late as it was, and knock the people up. I went so far, indeed, as to open my door. But before I had crossed the threshold I heard footsteps approaching, and looking in the direction of the staircase I saw two people emerging from it, bearing candles.

This touch of reality, this contact with the commonplace of life, reassured me, and once more I told myself that I had let my fancy run away with me, and had made much out of nothing. I retreated unseen, closed my door and heard the two go by, on their way to the end of the corridor.

At any rate the matter was out of my hands now, and shaking off the spell I undressed and plunged thankfully into bed. I was weary and I fell asleep at once, but though my mind, before I lost consciousness, reverted to my own affairs, or rather to poor Perceval's fate, I must have harked back during sleep to the incident, for at some time in the night I had an ugly dream—a dream of clutching hands and cloaked shapes, and I awoke heated and with bursting temples, to fancy that I heard a cry for help.

I stumbled out of bed and groped my way to the door and opened it. But all was still outside, and after

assuring myself of this I went back to bed, and, thank Heaven, when I opened my eyes again a man was hammering at my door, and the world was awake and afoot—the blessed workaday world! It was half after six—would I take coffee in my room, the man asked, or in the sitting room? A wet morning, Excellency, he was sorry to say. The carriage at seven? Yes, Excellency, all was prepared. Herr Jäger had seen to it.

It was barely light, the sun had not yet risen, and it had turned cold; autumn, and almost winter had come in the night, as I learned when I opened the window. A steady rain, too, was falling. But, thank God, the sick fancies of darkness had passed with the night, and Francis Cartwright was his own man again.

I dressed in high spirits—I had furnished myself in Berlin with what I needed for the journey—and I took my coffee and rolls standing at the table, anticipating with a pleasure, which even thoughts of poor Ellis could not quite damp, the movement of the day and the adventures it might embrace. At seven I descended and found Herr Jäger on the doorstep in the act of despatching another party. My carriage was in waiting behind them, and as they drove away, it drew up to the door.

The good Herr turned to me with a smiling greeting. "I am afraid, Jäger," I said, "that you are losing all your guests at once."

He threw out his hands. "No great loss—those!" with a shrug. "They go also for Hamburg—the Waechters. The young lady—His Excellency learned from her what he wanted, I trust?"

I laughed. "No," I answered. "Unfortunately she was not the lady I took her for. If she had been she would be travelling the other way."

"Ah!" nodding. "I was a little surprised, I confess, at His Excellency knowing them. I did not think them quite of his condition, and we who keep inns are judges, *mein Herr*. But," lowering his voice, "His Excellency may like to know that inquiry was made—at the back this morning—at what hour he was leaving."

"Indeed!" I smiled—I could afford to smile with

that little slip of Davout's in my pocket. "By the police, I suppose?"

"Well—probably. Most probably. His Excellency's position, if I may be forgiven for referring to it, is of course——"

"Delicate?" I nodded. "To be sure, Herr Jäger, it is. And I am the more grateful to you for taking me in so kindly. Be sure the circumstances shall be reported to my Foreign Office, and when we return, your house shall be specially recommended to English travellers. As for me, have no fear. I am easy—all is in order." And I shook the good fellow by the hand.

"You have no servant? I am afraid—" He looked at the carriage.

"Ah, I see," I said. "You have provided a double *calèche*. No matter. I will take what small baggage I have inside, as the front seat is open to the weather." And a moment later, this arrangement having been made, I left the door and my bowing host, and was on my way, driving through the bald, grey streets towards the Unter den Linden. It was broad daylight by now, and the sun had risen, but for all we could see of it there might have been no sun.

As we passed the Brandenburg Thor, I noticed for the first time the absence of the Chariot of Victory which Napoleon had carried off to Paris, and it brought to my mind the French quip on him, "*Le Char l'attend*" for *Le Charlatan*, and I laughed. Even the rain did not damp me, but for the poor postboys it was another matter. They rode with humped shoulders, little rivulets streaming from their black glazed hats, their drenched woollen tassels sticking out in ludicrous fashion from the collars of their rain-cloaks.

It was the 2nd of November when I thus left Berlin, just fifteen weeks after our start from Iglau. But something was still to happen before I was clear of the town. At the barrier I had to wait. There were half a dozen carriages and *Eilwagens* before me, taking their turn to pass the examination—it seemed to be strict that morning—and among the waiting travellers I identified the four persons who had left the hotel before me.

Their presence recalled the foolish stew into which I had permitted an over-wrought imagination to cast me the previous night, but I don't know that I should have remarked them particularly but for an altercation which arose, while we waited, between them and a man who, though he had not the look of one of the beggars that haunt such places, appeared to be plaguing them with some petition. Apparently they had repulsed him once, but he continued to plead with desperate insistence.

"If it is only a stage!" I heard him whine. "If it is only a stage! For God's sake, lady, just a stage!"

"Curse you!" one of the party flung at him. "Begone! Can't you see, you fool, that we have no room, Schapkopf? And if we had, I'd——"

"I'll sit on the step!" the man persisted. "On the step or anywhere! *Mein Gott*, just a stage, High-born! If my wife were not dying——"

"D—n her," the man retorted coarsely. "Let her die! Whip him off! Whip him off, boy! We've no room, I tell you, you rascal!"

One of the officials in moving down the line reached me at this moment. Idly, I asked him what the trouble was.

He looked back. "Oh, that?" he said, shrugging his shoulders. "It's a man wants a lift for nothing—to Hamburg. Wish he may get it, *mein Herr*! But I think he's silly! He's been here this half hour plaguing every carriage that's passed through with his nonsense. Says his wife's dying in Hamburg and he's penniless. Lies, I'm thinking! An old story! This all you've got, *mein Herr*?"

"It's enough," I said, but at the same moment I slipped a double thaler into his palm. I had no mind to produce Davout's safe conduct in such places, and to avoid the necessity I had begged one of the Baron's official cards, which Grüner had countersigned above the words, "The bearer is known to me. Let him pass."

The man took the money. "Well, I suppose it should do," he grumbled. "It is irregular, but—very well."

He passed on, for by this time there were others behind me, and my carriage moved up the line. It was now my turn to be importuned by the man with the dying wife,

and very pat he was with his story, which would have moved me more if I had not seen him apply to others. Even as it was, his appeal and his desperate offer to travel anywhere, anywhere, pole or step, if the *Wohlgeboren* would only take him, made me look him over.

He certainly had not the air of an habitual beggar. The wrap-rascal that covered him, from his coarse rig-and-furrow stockings to a hat broken but decent, was white at the seams, but still was whole, and the man looked clean, with the pale pinched face of an indoor artisan. His story might be true, and in that case he was to be pitied ; and by and by, whether it was this that moved me, or only the desire to be rid of his importunity, I found myself in doubt.

After all, the fellow's company would not do me any harm. The seat before me was empty, he would not incommode me. So at the last moment, as my carriage moved forward to the barrier, " Well, get in ! Get in in front, man," I said, " if it's really as bad as that with you. But for heaven's sake, no more words ! You may come a stage."

" *Gott sei dank, wohledelgeborener Herr !* " he cried, and hat in hand, making himself as small as possible, he slid in at the front. " I have asked many, but until now——"

" There, enough ! No more words ! " I cried impatiently, ashamed of my weakness. And a moment later, reflecting that I might have been more than weak in accepting a stranger's company, I doubted. However, there the man was, I had not the heart to turn him out again, and as he took the hint and fell silent, I said no more. A moment later we left the barrier behind us and trundled away on the Spandau road.

The rain fell, the postboys bobbed up and down in their saddles, we left the Charlottenburg quarter behind us, we rumbled on a boarded track, again we plunged off it into bottomless depths of mud. The lads had all they could do, poor wretches, to keep their nags on their feet, and if this was a sample of the road within a league of Berlin I suspected that its state farther on would more than bear out the Baron's account.

Even now, though the boys were hired at the courier rate, we were scarcely doing one German mile an hour, and in the wet bottoms about Spandau we crawled. It was half-past nine when we reached the fortress town, and ten before, after changing horses, we had left it behind us.

Thenceforth we struggled forward, under a steady downpour, now through mud into which we sank almost to the hubs of the wheels, now under gloomy pines where again and again in their efforts to avoid the rutted ground the drivers bumped us—at the risk of breaking everything—against the stumps. I fumed, I fretted, I resigned myself; and about noon, reaching a village the very name of which I have now forgotten, but which seemed to boast a decent inn, I sprang out, announced that I should dine there, and thankfully sought a glowing stove.

It had not yet occurred to me that we might not reach Kyritz that night, and I made the mistake of resting for an hour after I had dined. It was two o'clock when we took the road again, and now, a little more resigned to the position, I had leisure to take in the aspect of the road and those who travelled it, and to note that here, too, the Baron's warning had been to the point.

Disbanded soldiers, begging their way home, sutlers' carts with sturdy rogues trudging behind them, skulking figures that peered at us from the undergrowth and were gone as soon as seen—these, and once a squad of horse-police armed to the teeth, bore abundant witness to the disordered state of the country and to the wrack which the ebb of war had left.

The waters, too, were rising. Towards four we came to a place where a swollen stream crossed the road, and much time was lost in persuading the postboys to attempt the crossing. I don't know that I should have persuaded them if one of the troops of vagabonds I have mentioned had not come up and offered their aid.

They sounded before us, led the frightened horses through the ford, propped up the carriage—in all I must allow, ably directed by my chance companion, at whose continued presence in the carriage—as he did not trouble me—I had silently winked. Indeed, I was glad to have him with us at this juncture, for our helpers were an ugly

crew, and if appearances went for anything would have as soon robbed us as aided us.

As the afternoon wore on I felt my spirits sink. I experienced in lieu of the briskness of the start a growing depression, as if some part of me, more sensitive than the mind, recognized that which was indeed the case—that I was about to lose touch with the life I knew, the life that had hitherto encircled me ; and to come face to face with dark and grim things.

At the time I set down the change to the weather, to the gloomy prospect of the road before me, to depression on Ellis's account ; but I believe now that some shadow cast by the future fell on me on that afternoon and silently warned me that I was about to descend to a lower plane and to come in contact for a span with that underworld which seethes beneath our civilization.

We were still over two German miles from Kyritz when the November day began to close in. The horses were jaded, the postboys out of temper, and we were plodding along at little more than a walk when we heard the horn of an approaching mail. The man who was riding shouted something to my fellows, and a moment later they pulled up, and the lad on the wheeler turned in his saddle.

" He says, *mein Herr*, that we cannot go beyond——" some half-heard name. " The water is out."

" Nonsense ! " I answered peevishly. " Get on ! "

The lad shrugged his shoulders and obeyed. But ten minutes later we met an empty *caléche*. I stopped it and got the same news from it. " And you'd best push on," the driver added, " for there's but one inn at Pessin, and it is like a fair already. There'll be no crossing before daylight."

" D—n ! " I said, forced to believe the story, and a good deal out of humour. " Go on ! " I cried. " We shall see when we get there."

But five minutes later we stopped again. The postilions —confound them !—would not go farther without lights. Then on again, with flagging horses, until suddenly we pulled up with a jerk that flung me against the front of the carriage. I thrust my head out of the window to

learn what was wrong, and made out a dark mass lying across the track, beyond the reach of our lights.

Between us and it three or four figures gesticulated, and these as they came forward I saw to be those of two men and two women. The taller of the men came up to the carriage door. "We've had an upset and lost a wheel," he said. "We shall be greatly obliged, *mein Herr*, if you will take two of us on to Pessin. It is only half a league and—" he broke off abruptly as our eyes met.

"Of course I will," I answered. "I will take on the two ladies with pleasure. I'm sorry I can't take all."

He was still staring at me. "If you'll take me and my wife then," he returned, "that will do. The girl and the lad can ride in on the two horses."

I was surprised. "But it's raining," I objected—indeed it was raining very heavily. "Surely the two ladies had better come on?"

He did not reply at once, but fell back, and for a moment conferred with his companions. The light shone on them—they had come within its compass—and I had now a good view of them; and I was very much mistaken if they were not the people who had left the "Russie" in front of me that morning—the same four, therefore, whom I had seen in the Thiergarten the day before.

But if this were so, and I was pretty sure of it, it did not explain the man's odd selection. And I was further surprised and not at all pleased when, breaking off the discussion, he returned to the window and persisted in his plan.

"It will be the same to you, *mein Herr*," he said, "whom you take. And we'll do, if you please, as I proposed. My daughter will be safe with her cousin. She is used to riding."

The woman advanced to support him. "If the gentleman cannot take us all in?" she said smoothly.

It was plain that the gentleman could not, and the suggestion was otiose. But the woman's movement afforded me a good view of her face, and I was convinced that she was not only the lady of the Thiergarten but the same woman whom I had seen leaving Wittenberg with the girl whom I now knew to be Norma Mackay.

Whether the girl who was with her now was the same, I could not say, as she kept out of the light.

However, I put that thought away for future digestion and in the meantime I had to deal with the man's request. It was his business, after all, who rode dry and who faced the weather; yet for an instant I hesitated, while in the half light behind the lamp the two and I gazed frowning at one another, like fencers feeling their antagonists' blades. And I confess I liked very little what I saw.

I did not like the woman—my mind was made up as to that. And I did not like the man; he was tall, he looked taller in his long, straight coat and beaver hat, and he was pale and lanthorn-jawed, with sinister sneering eyes and something odd and unusual about his face—at the moment I could not say what. But least of all did I like the coincidence which had brought us together again. It seemed as if I was never to be quit of these people—of them and of the ambiguous atmosphere which they carried about with them and which I felt and resented at that moment.

However, I could not refuse to take them up, and "No, I am not able to take you all in," I said. "I have room for no more than two, as you see. But I fear—" with a glance at the two who stood forlornly waiting half a dozen paces away, the rain soaking their shoulders—"I fear that the young lady will be very wet."

"Alas, we are all pretty wet for that," the woman said lightly, and laid her hand on the door. On which I opened it, and she stepped in, a tiny dog in her arms. The bells on its collar tinkled as she sat back beside me, and her companion closing the door, went to get up in front. As he did so, I heard him utter an exclamation.

"Oh, you!" I heard him say. "If I had known that. So you got your lift, eh? How often does your wife die, my joker?"

The man made some humble response, which was lost in the rumble of the wheels. As we skirted the foundered carriage which had been drawn partly out of the way, our lights travelled across the faces of the two whom we were leaving, and was it my fancy, or some odd effect of light and shade, or did I read in the girl's white face and strained eyes a silent appeal?

CHAPTER XV

"Oh, I am Frightened!"

My fancy, or some trick of the light? Though vague suspicions moved in my mind I might have set the thing down to one or the other, if the woman beside me had kept her mouth shut. But she made the mistake of offering to explain. "Silly girl!" she said in a tone of affection, that seemed to me to ring false. "She was always afraid of the dark from a child."

"Then," I said, "I am surprised, *gnädige Frau*, that you left her behind."

"So! But I had to think first of my husband, *mein Herr*. He has a chest complaint, and with that in mind we had no choice but to avail ourselves of your kindness—as we have."

She spoke with a silkiness meant to propitiate. But of all makeshifts for refinement affectation is the poorest, and her voice failed to persuade, and her excuse also; for if the latter were true, why had she suffered the man to take the outside seat which was exposed to the weather? However, it was no business of mine to put my finger on the blot, and "Still it was a pity to leave her behind," I said. "If I had known I might have——"

"Oh, no, indeed," politely, "we could not have trespassed on you farther."

"I might have set down my friend in front," I concluded dryly. "He might have walked."

She did not understand me, for I think that she had not caught the drift of her husband's words as he stepped in, nor recognized the importunate of the barrier. So, "Oh, we could not have suffered that," she replied. "Azor!" to the dog, which was sniffing at me, "Be quiet! And behave, will you?" And then for a time we were both silent, though I have no doubt that our thoughts were busy with each other.

I have said that I did not like her. I liked nothing in her. A bad kind of woman, I thought, ill-bred and affected. What she thought of me is another matter,

though I know now that she had already identified me with the person who had inquired for the Mackay girl the previous day; which accounted, if the girl were really Norma Mackay, for the reluctance of the party to let the girl travel in my company.

I am not so sure that she had carried her identification farther back—to Grossenhayn and Wittenberg, for the carriage was dark, and she had had as yet but an imperfect view of me. And I was now differently dressed.

Besides, when she had seen me at those places I had not been alone; I had been in company with Ellis. As I thought of this it was strange how vividly and how powerfully Perceval's pale face and grave eyes rose before me in the darkness of the carriage! How strong was the feeling of his presence, how poignant the sense of his personality that suddenly and in a moment oppressed me. It was an extraordinary and an uncomfortable sensation; and it gave rise to a thought as extraordinary.

He had travelled this way, on this very road. He had halted, it might be, at this very place to which we were bound. And he had travelled, he had halted in uneasiness of mind, already under the shadow of the tragic and mysterious fate which awaited him a few stages onward. Could it be that he had travelled in this very carriage, suffered in it, reproached me in it? Could it be that he—that he haunted it now?

It was a wild, it was the wildest idea, and one which in my sober senses I should have been the first to ridicule. But for the moment it possessed me to such a degree that I caught myself now glancing over my shoulder, and now peering fearfully at my companion. She had brought into the carriage a heavy overpowering scent—the Germans know no mean in such things. Could it be that? But no, Perceval had used no scent; I could not associate any scent with him. It could not be that which brought his personality, his reproachful eyes and pale face so vividly, so uncomfortably, so hauntingly before me.

The feeling was akin to the gloomy sensation which I had experienced when walking the streets of Berlin the night before, and it was a relief to me when my neighbour spoke and broke both the spell and the silence.

" Do you think that we are nearly there ? " she asked. She was leaning forward, peering into the darkness.

" I think we must be," I replied, breathing more freely.

" You know the road perhaps ? "

" I have travelled it. And you, too, Madam ? "

" Yes—once." Was it fancy, or did she shiver as she spoke ? Then, " You, too, *mein Herr*, are for Hamburg ? "

" As good," I said. " For Altona."

I was aware of her only as a dark shape seated beside me, but it seemed to me that at that she turned her face to me. But she only answered, " Ah, Altona." And then, " From South Germany perhaps ? "

I suspected that she was uneasy about me and would learn what she could, and I assented. Doubtless my accent had to that extent betrayed me. A moment later, as lights gleamed on the road before us, " I think we are there," I said, and I was thankful for it. For I wanted above all things to be rid of the woman. She weighed on me and made me uncomfortable. Even her kindness to the dog—and she petted it and fondled it with affectation, calling it her Liebling, her Azor, and the like—did not conciliate me.

We stopped, amid much confusion, in front of a building which I was thankful to see promised better than I had expected. A stream of light and noise poured from a large double doorway, which suggested to me that the house had once been a farmstead ; and whether it was the invitation that this held out that moved us, or a natural impulse to seek shelter, or a common desire to part company, we all melted inwards with speed and a blind eye to one another.

No host presented himself to receive us, and the threshold crossed, I found myself standing, valise in hand, in a wide, draughty earthen-floored passage, once I fancied a cartway, but now cumbered with tables and benches and crowded with brawling pushing guests. From a large room on the left came the strains of a fiddle and the rumble and clatter of men dancing in heavy boots, and I had a vision, glancing that way, of roughly-clad peasants whirling heavily and clumsily round in a cloud of tobacco smoke —for every other dancer had a long pipe in his mouth.

I cursed my luck as I saw that to an unusual influx of guests was added the pandemonium of a rustic dance, and shrugging my shoulders I turned to the room on my right, where I found things scarcely better. The room was crowded in every part with impatient, bawling, supping guests, among whom distracted serving-wenches, here summoned by raucous voices, there snatched at by clutching hands, staggered to and fro, unequal to a tithe of the calls made upon them.

At one end, at a great open fire-place—a rare sight in Germany and found only in the rural districts—cooking was going on, and the steam and odour filled the room and hung like a canopy over the company. Everywhere were noise, disorder, the reek of victuals and damp clothes.

I paused dismayed by the prospect. The man and woman had entered before me, and were standing at a little distance away, equally at a loss. For a separate room or tolerable attention—these things I saw were out of the question; and I was looking uncertainly about for someone, the host or another, to whom I might apply, when I caught the eye of my friend of the barrier—the man to whom I had given the lift.

He was the last person to whom I should have looked for aid in such a quandary, but he not only met my eye, he unmistakably, though humbly, beckoned to me. I pushed my way through the press, and I found that somehow, I am sure I don't know how, he had got hold of the crimson-faced, perspiring host; and not only that, but he had secured his ear also, as the next step proved.

On either side of the fire stood a couple of small tables, hauled in to supplement the long tables that filled the room. At one of these the red-faced man, still with my chance-met friend at his elbow, made room for me by unceremoniously sweeping away a guest who might or might not have finished.

At any rate, and however it was effected, here in a trice and to my surprise I found myself seated; and seated in the best position in the room, within the cheering influence of the fire, and where I could by turning a little to the side, warm my chilled feet among the pots that simmered and bubbled at my feet.

It was such a piece of luck as I could not have expected, for in the confusion all distinctions of class were lost; and I appreciated it the more when I saw that my late companions were still at a loss and seeking seats in a very ill humour. I had done already as much for them as could be expected, and I had no mind to resign my luck even in the lady's favour; so I hung my cloak on the back of my bench and placed my valise under it. Then I looked round, prepared to enter upon the noisy contest for food which raged about me.

But I had no call to do so. By what magic he obtained it where so many were waiting, I cannot say, but in a twinkling the man of the barrier leaned over my shoulders—but still with a meek and deprecatory air—and plumped down before me a plate of bacon salad, a huge flagon of Cotbus beer, and a pancake. He muttered humbly, "*Zu Tischebitte, Hofedelgeborer,*" and vanished like the good fairy of the legends.

Never indeed was a lift more speedily or more handsomely rewarded, and I did not appreciate his aid the less as I saw that the Waechter couple were still in debate with some persons whose places they were striving to take. A few minutes later I perceived that they had succeeded; and then, as they sat down, I lost sight of them. But when I again looked that way I met their eyes, and quickly as they averted them I saw enough to be sure that the feeling of dislike which I felt for them was shared on their side.

The cause was to seek, but most certainly if I had ever read suspicion and something like fear in any eyes, I read it in theirs—and something more, a venom that set me thinking. Where had I seen the man before? Where had I encountered a face that reminded me of his—yet vaguely and doubtfully? I could not remember, I could not fix the occasion or the man. But somewhere, somehow, at some time, I was sure that we had met.

It was plain that I could not hope for a bed. I saw that at best I must spend the night by the fire—if by luck I could retain my place; and accordingly I did not hurry over my meal. The shrill squeak of the fiddle, the thunder of the dancers' feet, and now and again a drunken

chorus, blew into our room and mingled with the clatter of knives and trenchers and the bawling of hungry guests.

To spend the evening in such a pandemonium, reeking with the smell of cooking and dim as a witch's cauldron with the steam of damp clothes, was no pleasant prospect even to me, inured to the place and warm and dry; but I could imagine that in the eyes of those who looked in for the first time the scene was one to raise the gorge. And presently, glancing up by chance, I saw, gazing in from the doorway, a small white face and a pair of frightened, dilated eyes that brought this home to me.

The sight did more. It went far to assure me that the girl whom I saw trembling on the threshold was Norma Mackay. I no longer felt any but the smallest doubt. As she and the queer misshapen creature who held her by the arm hung a moment gazing in, I had a clear view of her; and dishevelled, draggled, travel-stained, piteous to look on as she was, I swore that I could not be mistaken.

If she was not the girl of the portrait, if she was not the Grand Duchess's governess, then it was the most remarkable case of a "double" that I had ever encountered. And convinced of this I looked with the greater curiosity at her companion; perhaps I might find in him the answer to the riddle of her presence.

If so, it was a dark riddle and an ugly answer. For I found him as remarkable, he impressed me as deeply, though in a different way, as the girl. In age he was neither man nor boy; in frame he was short, squat, powerful, a dwarf or nearly a dwarf; in face low-browed, heavy-jowled, brutish, with no more soul in his countenance, no more intelligence in his wolfish eyes, than one might find in the lowest animal.

He was indeed an animal and no more; nor had I ever seen a countenance which repelled me more strongly. To see him holding that hapless girl by the arm, to see him dragging her forward, even to see him in her company, was a shock to the sensibilities. It was to picture with shame the yoking of a Una with a satyr.

How could, how could, I asked myself, the father and mother have left them together? Cousins? No, never! Never! Impossible! But more, these were no father,

no mother—I was sure of it. Whatever the mystery, whatever the chain of wickedness or folly, that had made this girl one with them, I was clear on that.

The girl—or every instinct that spoke in me was false—was Norma Mackay; Norma Mackay who should at this moment be in the Grand Ducal Schloss at Zerbst! Then dark and deep-woven indeed must be the web that had snared her and made her the tool and companion of these dubious—ay, and more than dubious—persons!

I do not think that I am emotional, for in acquiring the *savoir faire* we lose in my line the *cœur sensible*. But I own that it was with something approaching horror that I viewed the scene that ensued, though the company—for the Germans who make a religion of sentiment keep it like other religions, for the closet—appeared to see only the risible side of it.

The lout—I remembered that I had heard the woman call him Karl—had not advanced more than a pace into the room before he caught sight of the fire. He was cold and I suppose that to him with an animal love of warmth it presented an irresistible attraction, for in a trice he headed for it, recklessly elbowing and jostling all who came in his way, and dragging the unfortunate girl after him.

The movement promised to land him cheek by jowl with me; but others as well as I discerned this, and before he had butted a road half-way down the room the man Waechter rose and intercepted him, seized him roughly by the arm, argued angrily with him—not, I fancied, without a warning glance in my direction.

But Master Karl was no more to be turned from his object than a thirsty ox making for water. He gibbered something, shaking his head like an enraged bull, flung off the detaining hand, and heedless of the jeers and laughter that attended his progress, broke away, still dragging the girl after him by the wrist.

He reached the hearth and, now no more than a yard or two from me, thrust himself almost into the blaze. Extending first one hand to the heat and then the other, he kept up a hoarse, inarticulate murmur which I suppose expressed his content. But I noticed that he still kept his grip on the girl, who was thus forced to stand, exposed

to the gibes and reproaches which his queer aspect and his blind rush had provoked.

His first craving satisfied, he thrust himself by force on to the end of the bench opposite me—the table held but four. This left the girl still on her feet; and more in pity than in mischief, though I knew very well that it would annoy my late companions, I rose and signed to her to take my place. The clown had sense enough to gather what I meant, and growling he released her arm.

The poor child, without raising her eyes, slid into the seat, while I moved with my plate to an upturned log that stood within the hood of the chimney. I was still within two feet of her.

I think she was going to thank me, but the dwarf snarled "*Stille! Stille!*" and with a savage glare reduced her to silence. Then without a moment's pause and regardless of his company he began to hammer the table and bawl for food.

I longed to take the savage by the shoulders and throw him out; nor was I alone in this. The man whom he had crowded up the bench was a weakling unable to resent it, but the next on the seat, who had been nearly pushed from it, and who was of a stouter build, reached out behind, grasped the lad by the collar and shook him. "Silence, you dirty dog!" he said. "Or I'll teach you manners! Have done and wait your turn. And push no more, stupid, or I'll pitch you into the fire!"

Karl glared at him, but cowed by his address, ceased to beat the table. I caught the eye of a crimson-faced old crone who was superintending the cooking, and I passed a quarter-thaler to her. "Give the girl something," I muttered. "She is famishing."

The woman nodded, took a wooden trencher from a pile, filled it and set it before the girl, Instantly the lad seized it, and took it to himself. But the old cook was equal to the occasion. She brought her great leaden spoon down on his head with a crack that was heard half a dozen yards away. "Have done, and wait your turn, ogre!" she cried, and returned the platter to the girl. "Or I'll hit you harder next time! They never paid a penny for your manners!"

He began to whimper and "Give him something," I said, "or we shall have no peace, Frau."

"I'd like to give him the spoon down his throat!" she said. But she did as I suggested, and he fell to, wolfing the food like the wild beast he was. Germans are at all times queer feeders, but such an eater as this I had never seen.

I seized the opportunity, and as unobtrusively as I could, I scrutinized the girl. She was in piteous case. She was wet and mud-stained to the waist by her walk, her hat was awry, her hair hung in wisps on cheeks blanched to the hue of paper. Her teeth chattered and her hands shook so that she could with difficulty raise the food to her mouth. For all this, fatigue and exposure might account.

But not for the stony expression, the look of despair, that pinched and distorted her features and for the time so robbed them of beauty that once again my mind veered about and I doubted. Was she, after all, Norma Mackay? Could the girl of the portrait have fallen to this? Or was I, haunted by a face, permitting a chance likeness to deceive me?

I could not say—at the moment. I could not be sure, now that I looked closely at her.

But at any rate, and whoever she was, it was a most unhappy girl that I saw before me, of that I was convinced; a girl whose lot, were it only in being the thrall and companion of this half-witted savage, appealed to every chivalrous, nay, every manly instinct. Whatever her sin or her folly, whatever the circumstances which had brought her to this pass, it was impossible to view her without pity, as it was impossible to look on the degraded creature opposite without desiring to rescue her from him.

I judged that in her misery she was almost unconscious of the present, or of the scene about her; she kept her eyes on her plate, and once only I fancied that she shot a terrified glance in my direction—but so swiftly that I was not sure of it. And once when her trembling hand allowed her knife to fall to the ground, and I silently replaced it, her bloodless lips moved, but without sound.

I was hot with indignation, yet I did not lose sight of

prudence, and I reflected. What could I do? Could I do anything? Were I once convinced that the girl was the missing Mackay, I might interfere, stranger and foreigner as I was. Gratitude, indeed, to the Duchess enjoined it. But what if she were not? What if those two, *louche* and suspect as they were, were in truth her father and mother? Then to interfere would not only be useless, but would expose me to most unwelcome ridicule. After all, I might be letting my sympathy run away with me.

I was still thinking—and it may be that the girl was thinking also; for on a sudden she rose and as if anxious to warm herself she turned to the fire and held out her hands. She did not look at me, though I was now abreast of her, but her lips moved. "Oh, help me!" she whispered. "Oh, I am frightened! I am frightened!"

The words were so low that I barely heard them, and for certain no one else could hear them. But the lad's suspicions were aroused by her movement, and he stretched out a huge hairy hand, gripped her delicate shoulder and pushed her back into her seat. As he did this, I noticed that not only was his hand abnormally large, but his arm was of unusual length. "Eat!" he growled. "Eat! That is your business!" he snarled.

"Oh, I am frightened! I am frightened!" The words, low as she had breathed them, vibrated in my ears. I felt that after this I had no choice. I must help her, Mackay or no Mackay, if I got the opportunity. I must help her even at the risk of ridicule, and even though the effort diverted me from my legitimate task! But how? How could I help her?

One thing only was plain. I must know more, I must know all. I must learn the circumstances that had brought her to this pass, and to do that I must gain speech with her. Meantime I shot a wary glance at the Waechters, man and woman, and I was not surprised to see that they were watching me. I surmised that my proximity to the girl was the cause of this, and it was no more than I expected when a moment later the two rose from their seats and came towards us.

CHAPTER XVI

A Scrap of Linen

They aimed for the farther side of the small table which stood at my elbow, and though I was sure that there was no one in the room of whose presence they were more sensible than of mine, they were careful to avert their eyes from me. The man laid his hand on Karl's shoulder, and shook him to attract his attention—shook him, I could see, in ill-suppressed irritation. "Come, you've eaten enough," he said. "Come! Do you hear, lad? We make arrangements for the night."

But Karl only acknowledged his grasp by twitching his shoulder free, and when the man repeated his words, "*Nein! Nein!*" he replied, and went on guzzling, his face almost in his platter.

"Then do you come, Walburga," the woman said.

The girl prepared to obey, but Karl, without raising his head, stretched out his hand, gripped her arm, and held her down. "*Nein! Nein!*" he growled. "Let be! We are warm here! Warm!"

"But she must come," the woman persisted. "Now, Walburga, come!" And more sharply, "Do you hear, child? We are waiting for you." She tried to speak calmly, but her voice was hard.

Again the girl would have obeyed and risen. But the lad dragged her down. "She's not to go," he snarled. "She's mine, mine! She's not to go." He shot an upward glance at them, his teeth bared. He was like an ill-tempered dog about to bite.

I suspect that the two could have willingly struck him for his ill-timed perverseness, but unable to reason with him in the presence of others they were helpless. They tried another line. "They are dancing in the other room," said the woman. "Bring Walburga and she will dance with you."

This time he rose to the bait. "Ho, dance?" he chuckled. "Ay, we'll dance! We'll dance, when I have eaten. And then we'll come back to the fire. The good, warm fire!"

" Well, you had better be quick," the woman rejoined, " or the fiddlers will be gone and you'll lose your fun, Karl."

I was sure that their aim was to remove the girl and avert the risk of my speaking to her. But for a while it seemed as if they were not to succeed. The boor continued to gorge himself, eating more like an animal than ever. Still the idea of dancing had found an entry to his mind, and at last, as abruptly as he did everything, he dropped his spoon, mumbled " We'll dance ! Ho ! Ho ! We'll dance ! " and struggled to his feet.

He jerked the girl to hers, but uncouth in this as in all things he lost his balance, and as he turned he came near to falling over the bench. He saved himself, but the sprawl with which he did so carried him and his unfortunate companion half way across the hearth. Thence, regardless of the abuse of those whom he jostled and elbowed, he ploughed a blind way to the door, dragging the girl behind him and followed by the curses of some and the laughter of others.

It was an exhibition which I was sure that the man and woman would have been glad to avoid, but they had at least succeeded in their object. They had broken up the party, and affecting to see only the comic side, they joined in the laugh and presently followed the couple at their leisure.

So did I—after a brief delay. An idea had occurred to me, and though I abhorred the publicity it must entail—for I have no more liking than another for cutting an absurd figure—I made my way to the threshold of the room in which the peasants were jigging. A crowd was already gathered about the door, and their jeers and laughter prepared me for the kind of farce that was going forward in the room, which was lit by smoky pine-knots fixed in iron rings on the wall.

A farce, indeed, for those who looked only at the leading actor ; but something very different for such as had eyes for the second performer. The wild antics of the misshapen, half-witted lad, his extravagant leaps and clumsy gestures as he whirled his partner up and down the floor, from which the other dancers had withdrawn, were warrant enough for the laughter of the herd. But

a glance at the girl's white face, to which not even this humiliation brought a blush, the sight of her hopeless eyes and her passive acquiescence, killed in me even the inclination to smile.

The peasants might cling to one another in their coarse glee, the fiddlers might bend themselves double, and the better sort turn from the door with a sneer, but under the comic mask I read a tragedy; and when the lout, exhausted at length by his exertions, flung himself breathless against the wall and amid a last uproarious gust of applause mopped his crimson face, I thrust my way through the crowd and crossed the floor towards him.

There was not one person there for whose opinion I cared a penny piece. And yet, so little do we like to incur the ridicule even of those whom we despise, I have seldom done a harder thing. I bowed gravely before the deformed lad.

"If your partner will condescend to honour me with a turn," I said, "while you are resting?"

He scowled at me, surprised and suspicious. "What is it?" he muttered.

"Perhaps your partner will dance a turn with me now?" I repeated, seeing out of the corner of my eye that the man and woman, forestalled by my action, were still out of hearing. "While you are resting?"

But "*Nein! Nein!*" he replied, glaring at me, more monster-like than ever. "She will not."

"Still," I said politely, striving to ingratiate myself, "we shared a table, *mein Herr*, and having supped together——"

For answer he snarled at me in his mongrel-like fashion, and seizing the girl by waist and shoulders whirled her roughly away. A burst of jeers and applause greeted this fresh *grotesquerie*, and baffled and defeated, liking little my conspicuous position in the middle of the floor, I fell back and effaced myself amid the group by the door.

Here I found myself elbow to elbow with the Waechters. But for the moment they took no heed of me, nor I of them. I did not despair and I waited. Something might yet fall out to favour me.

It did. The creature brought his dance—if a dance it could be called—to a close by a bound which landed

him all arms and legs amid those about me, whom he scattered every way. Before he had regained his balance I attacked him anew. "Now, perhaps," I said, "if the young lady is not tired she will honour me with a turn?"

He squinted at me, panting, and for the moment unable to speak; in the end he would no doubt have refused. But the choice was not left to him. The woman had foreseen my action, and touching me on the shoulder to compel my attention, she spoke for him. "What is it, *mein Herr*?" she asked.

"I thought that perhaps your daughter would——"

"Dance with you?"

"Precisely, Frau Waechter," I said with a bow, "if she will so honour me."

"Walburga is German," she retorted. "She does not dance with Englishmen."

The reply was as good as a slap in the face, and before I could recover from my surprise the woman had turned her shoulder to me, drawn Karl and the girl through the doorway, and the four were moving back to the common room.

I did not follow, partly because I had no mind to involve myself further—I had done all that I could; and partly because the woman's words had cast light, whether she intended it or not, into a dark place. These people knew me then; they knew more of me than she had disclosed in the carriage and more than I could explain. That was clear, and perplexed as well as angry I stared after them. And well it was that I did so, for as I stared I saw something.

A little thing, a morsel of white stuff that for a moment rolled across the dirty floor of the passage, dragged by the hem of a skirt, and then, released, lay abandoned on the threshold of the opposite room. If either of the four had looked back it must have been seen, but they did not turn, and I stepped after them and picked the thing up. It was a tiny square of fine linen, not over fresh, crumpled and damp—a woman's handkerchief.

If it belonged to the girl, had she let it fall on purpose, pinning a faint despairing hope to this frail, ay, frailest of messengers? I could not say, but hiding it in my hand I stepped back into the dancing room. I sought a corner

not open to observation from the passage, and there turning my back on the room I examined my *trouvaille*.

It did convey a message, whether chance or purpose had abandoned it! For embroidered in white on one of the corners were the initials, N.M.

So the girl was Norma Mackay! That point was settled for me, settled once and for all. The girl was Norma Mackay, and not improbably she wished me to know it. It might be that from the depths of her unhappiness, from the deep waters of heaven knew what intolerable fate, she had released this fragile buoy, she had sent up this dumb, this pathetic appeal for aid and for rescue. It might be that, aware that I was the person who had asked for her at the hotel on the day before, she had let this go, in the hope, however forlorn, however desperate, that it might fall into my hands and inform me who she was.

And God knows her appeal could not have taken a more moving shape. That morsel of linen still damp with her tears and warm from her hand, and so fine and so flimsy that I could hide it in my grasp, spoke to my heart with such eloquence, it moved me to a passion of pity so hot that it was all that I could do to withhold myself from rash, from instant action! It was all that I could do to refrain from following the sinister trio into the next room and challenging them there and then with the facts.

However, prudence prevailed, and fortunately, for I began to see that I had become an object of interest to the clowns about me. The woman's taunt, the word "Englishman," had been overheard, and as I turned I met on all sides dark looks—I caught threatening whispers. I saw that in any contest in this *milieu* I should have public feeling and the odds against me.

To act in haste, therefore, would be both to court defeat and to put the enemy on their guard; and though I lost no time in leaving the dancing room and mingling with the more respectable crowd in the other apartment, I had no longer a mind to act rashly.

The less, as I was in time to surprise, amid the movement of the company now settling down to repose, a thing which gave me a shock. Karl and the girl were not to be seen, but at the farther end of the room, and near a second

door, I espied the Waechters. They were talking to my friend of the barrier, and meantime were keeping, I could see, a sharp look-out for me, for I no sooner perceived them than the conference broke up. The Waechters melted away through the door behind them, while my humble friend made his way towards me, rubbing his hands and putting on a great show of anxious devotion.

"I have kept your place, honoured sir," he said. "I have kept it." He bowed me fussily towards it. "Your cloak too—all is safe. All! So! I had my eye on them. And at what hour will it please you, honoured sir, to have the horses?"

I checked him. "Who are those people?" I asked. Then, seeing that he hesitated and apparently was about to prevaricate, "whom you were just talking to, my friend?"

"Those? Whom the *Hofedelgeborener* took up on the road?" He shrugged his shoulders and spread out his hands. "Their name is Waechter, the postboy tells me. Herr and Frau Waechter, of Hamburg. Persons," confidentially, "of no consequence, Excellency. Little people."

"The lad is half-witted," I said.

"*Der Zwerg! Der Kobold!* The *Wohlgeborener* is right. He should not be about. He is—unspeakable! But the rain has ceased and at what hour may I have the honour of ordering the horses for his Excellency?"

"At eight," I said coldly.

"I will see that they are ready. Nothing shall be forgotten. It shall be done as said, *mein Herr*. To the minute. Your place, honoured sir, is here."

I had my suspicions, but the man was useful—he had kept my place and it was about the best place in the room—and I contented myself for the present with dismissing him in such a manner as to show him that he was out of favour. This done I made myself as comfortable as I could, with my back against the wall and my feet upon a log within a few inches of the embers. The cook and her attendants had withdrawn, and the company were beginning to settle down for the night.

Most of the lights had been extinguished, the fire had been banked up, and under the tables and against the walls parties were littering down in little bivouacs of

their own, some content with a rug and the bare floor, others ensconced behind improvised screens formed of their baggage. In a distant corner one table still bore lights, and at this three or four officers, the last party to arrive, were at supper, their table, in contrast with the obscurity about them, wearing the aspect of a scene on a stage.

I fancied that they were French, but though an occasional laugh, or the clink of a glass, reached me, they made little noise, and I got more annoyance from the heavy snoring of those who lay about me and who slept as raucously as they talked.

It was an odd scene, this camp of belated travellers, stayed by the waters and forced to shifts that had seemed more in place in a Turkish *caravanserai*. But I knew that it was no uncommon sight on the worst road in Prussia, and my thoughts soon passed from observation of it to consideration of the matters that pressed upon my mind; and in particular to reflection upon that one which had just now, and so deeply, engaged my interest.

The girl—the poor girl, whose moving message had reached me, she must be rescued! She must be rescued! On that I was fixed, and it seemed to me that I knew enough now to render the task easy. She could not be lawfully in the custody of the vulgar pair who accompanied her—that was plain. She could not be at once their daughter, Walburga, and Norma Mackay, the child of a colonel in the Danish service. She could not belong to them or their class, and be at the same time the Grand Duchess's governess.

And this point settled by the initials on the handkerchief, my course seemed clear. I had only to go to the police and place the matter in their hands; and this I was determined to do before I left in the morning. The police would intervene, and once in their charge, and assured of protection, the girl would speak and the mystery which involved her and which it passed my ingenuity to solve, would be unriddled by a word.

Undoubtedly that was the obvious course, and I resolved that at seven in the morning I would go to the Town Office and dispatch the affair. It need not detain me long—I might still be on the road by eight. And

even if it did detain me, even if I arrived a day late at Kyritz, I should still have time to push there, and at Perleberg, the inquiry which was my first business and which I had set out to make.

Whereas if I abandoned this girl, English by blood as she was, and the victim of some dark intrigue—if, knowing what I now knew, I left her in the hands of the loathsome gang who surrounded her, I felt that I should never, I could never, forgive myself. For she lived; she lived and suffered, while poor Perceval was gone. He was past help.

And though I had much wherewith to reproach myself on his account, though my honour and career depended on my success in detecting his assassins and recovering, were it possible, the missing despatches—though I dared not indeed waste one hour or remit one effort which might serve to that end, still the memory of the hapless girl's face warred with my scruples, challenged my manhood, haunted to the last my waking moments.

A Don Quixote? No, no Don Quixote. But English, as she was English, and master of events. For had I not an all-powerful instrument, had I not Davout's warrant in my pocket? How, thus armed, could I leave her? How could I abandon her defenceless to her fate, ay, defenceless and with no possible aid if I failed her? No, surely I was warranted, fully warranted in giving a day, were a day necessary, to her rescue.

I slept at last, and slept well, though my posture was not of the easiest. Yet I was warm. I had that advantage over many, though even for that I had to pay the price. For at some unknown hour of the night I was suddenly and rudely aroused by a man falling over my feet; and instinctively, though but half awake, I seized him. "What is it? What the devil are you doing?" I cried.

"Putting wood on the fire, stupid," he retorted. "Do you want us all to freeze?"

"Well, get off my cloak," I grumbled peevishly, for the man was standing on one skirt of it, and my hasty movement had dragged it off my shoulders. "Lift your foot, do you hear?"

He muttered something, but complied, flung a couple of

billets on the fire and retreated. It was too dark to see more than the outline of his figure, and after listening awhile to the heavy breathing that filled the room, I drew my cloak about me and five minutes later was again asleep.

I had done much in the last three days, and no doubt I was weary, for I slept not only well but long. The movements of those who were first on foot did not rouse me, and when I at last opened my eyes I found that the fire was ablaze, the cook and her maids were at work, knives and spoons were going briskly, and half the tables were filled. The grey light of morning was stealing in at the windows, and beginning to contest it with the smoky rays of the tallow dips; and alarmed I started up. I looked at my watch and uttered an execration. It was half-past seven!

Well, I had still time, though not too much time. I asked one of the servants if the road was open, learned that it was, and seizing my hat I went out to the front of the house. Here all the world was agog, running to and fro, carrying out bags and trunks and packing calashes; some bribing, some threatening, and all in haste to be gone and claiming the first horses, or contending for places in the *Eilwagen*.

I found my barrier friend, who seemed to be far from the hindmost in the fray, and I was about to tell him that he might postpone our start for an hour when the sight of a carriage which was leaving the door startled me. "Hallo!" I exclaimed. "Those people—the Waechters? They are not away yet?"

"They?" he replied. "Yes, honoured sir, this half hour past."

I swore—who would not have? To be so jockeyed, and through my own remissness. "What, all four?" I cried.

"Yes, all four, honoured sir. For Kyritz, where they intend to breakfast."

"Then why the devil didn't you wake me?" I thundered unreasonably enough; but I was vexed, and there was no one else I could blame.

He stared. "I did not know that the *gnädiger Herr*—"

"Well, get the horses out," I ordered, cutting him short. "Get them harnessed as quickly as you can. I am in haste. A cup of coffee and I shall be with you."

I went in, fuming, got from the good-natured cook some coffee and a hunch of rye bread—the white had all been eaten—and in less than five minutes I was out again, valise in hand. The man had done his part, the horses were being put to. I flung in my valise, turned back to the inn, and paid the reckoning, not forgetting the cook, then returned to the carriage. Three or four men had gathered about it, and I was running my eye over them, my hand in my pocket, deciding whom I must fee, when they all wheeled and closed round me.

"*Mein Herr*," the foremost announced bluntly, "I am from the Town Office, and I must ask you to come with me."

"The devil!" I exclaimed, staring at the man. "Why? Who are you?"

"Police," he replied bluntly. "Information has been laid that you are an alien, *mein Herr*, and the town offizier desires to see your papers."

"I'll soon settle that," I retorted. And I thrust my hand into my pocket in search of the card which Justus Grüner had signed for me.

But the man raised his hand. "Not here," he said stolidly "I have no authority. You must see the Chief." He was a typical German, fat, with a bristling flaxen moustache, his neck rippling over his coat collar.

I was about to remonstrate, but remembered myself. It would do no good, and, after all, this could only mean ten minutes' delay. "Very well," I said. "The sooner the better. How far is it?"

"Three minutes' walk. This way, *mein Herr*." He beckoned to one of the others to follow us, and I was moving off with him when I remembered that I had better leave Grüssbaum—such I had learned was the barrier man's name—in charge of the carriage. But I could not see him. He had vanished, and "If you are looking for your servant," said the policeman, "he has been taken to the office."

"Oh!" I said, no little annoyed. "Then will you be good enough to leave a man to look after my carriage?"

"We have taken charge," he replied impassively. "This way."

CHAPTER XVII

The Dunghill Cock

The summons was irritating, the delay a nuisance. But, apart from this, the affair caused me no uneasiness, for a dozen words and the production of my credentials should settle the matter, and I went with the man without further demur. The little town lay along the road beyond the inn, and between it and the river; to enter it we had to pass through one of those gatehouses of weathered brick, with a pair of pyramidal towers atop and a stone statue niched in the façade, which are common in the Ukermark.

A hundred yards of a narrow cobbled street brought us to a tiny market-place, scarcely larger than a big room, on the farther side of which, and raised on brick arches, stood a town-house of a size to match the square.

My conductor led me to a low-browed door under one of the arches, before and about which a knot of curious townsfolk had already mustered. He pushed me in before him, for the nearer we drew to the great man the less ceremony I noticed was used, and I mounted a narrow turning staircase lit only by an arrow-slit. At the head of this I blundered down a step into a low-browed vaulted room, and there found myself in the presence of five or six men.

The principal, whom I took to be the chief of police, sat behind a table, a pen in his hand—a meagre, bilious-looking man with small angry eyes. Beside him, perched on another table and swinging their feet, lounged a couple of French officers—two of those, unless I was mistaken, whom I had seen at supper the night before. The party was completed by Grüssbaum, who seemed to be in custody, and a couple of policemen, who stood one on each side of him. The man behind the table and the two Frenchmen eyed me closely as I entered, but beyond that vouchsafed me no greeting.

Apparently they had begun to interrogate Grussbaum, for the chief's shrewish eyes left me for him, and his voice, astonishing in volume considering his size, was making the roof ring. "You are the Englishman's servant?"

he stated, stabbing at the culprit with his pen. "It is useless to deny it! You are the Englishman's servant?"

"*Nein! Nein!* It is not so," Grüssbaum asseverated passionately. "Far from it, Herr Offizier, asking a thousand pardons. Far from it! I do not know him. The way of it was this." And he began to explain the manner of his connection with me, the fix he had been in, his dying wife, his lack of money. But before he had stammered through half his tale——

"Don't lie to me" the Chief roared, cutting him short with a truculence that filled me with indignation. "You are his servant! I say it is so! Where did he hire you?"

The poor fellow appeared to be frightened out of his wits, and out of pity for him I interposed. "One moment, Herr Offizier," I said politely. "Allow me to explain. I can set all this right in a——"

"Silence! Silence!" the bully shouted, and slapped the table to enforce his order. "Stop that man's mouth if he speaks. Your turn will come presently, my man, and soon enough for you! Now do you," to Grüssbaum, "out with it! And the truth! Where did he hire you? What is he doing here? What is his business—though, *Gott im Himmel*, that is pretty clear! Make a clean breast, you dog, and at once! Or I shall know how to open your mouth!"

Simmering with indignation I tried again to interpose. "But, *mein Herr*," I said, "the man is not my servant. He is a stranger to me. I know no more than his name. If you will permit me to explain or will listen to his story——"

"Stop his mouth! Choke him!" the Jack-in-office shouted, while the Frenchmen grinned and swung their feet in appreciation of the scene. "I'll deal with you by and by! Your turn will come, and soon enough for you. Now, you!" fixing the trembling Grüssbaum with his angry ferrety eyes. "Speak, rogue, or I'll scourge it out of you."

The poor fellow squirmed before him as helpless as a rabbit in the clutches of a stoat. "Oh, indeed, indeed, honourable sir," he pleaded, "I am innocent. I am innocent as a babe unborn. It was this way. I had no money and my wife was dying at Hamburg——"

" To hell with your wife ! " the man retorted. I think he was at pains to exalt his office in the Frenchmen's presence, and knew no way but the way of brutality. " Once more, and, mark you, this is your last chance. You are the Englishman's servant. Where did he hire you ? "

" Nowhere ! Nowhere ! " the frightened man protested, passionately clasping his hands and holding them out before him in appeal. " Far be it from me ! I am a stranger ! I do not know him ! I did not know that he was an Engländer ! I am a poor honest man. My wife is at Hamburg——"

" Enough ! If you won't say one way," the bully thundered, " you shall another. The stick ! The stick ! That'll loosen your tongue, I'll warrant. Take him through ! Take him through, and give him a dozen well laid on ! And then bring him back and I'll warrant he'll tell another tale. Or he will have another dose. Out with him ! Out with him ! "

In a trice the two policemen seized the unhappy man and were already thrusting him through a low-browed door behind the Offizier's table, when, unable to bear this, I thrust myself forward. If I had simmered before, I was boiling now. " You'll do it at your peril ! " I cried. " If you lay a hand on that man before you have heard me, you will repent it ! "

But " Silence ! Silence ! " the bully shouted, amazed at my audacity. " Another word and I—pinch that man's throat ! Choke him if he speaks again before he is spoken to ! And take that knave out and lay on six more for his spy of a master's sake ! Out with him ; out with him, and don't spare his hide, or your own shall smart ! *Mein Gott,* am I to be bearded by this scum of an islander with his neck in a halter ? "

With a hand gripping either arm and another on my throat, I could do no more than choke with rage as they ran out the poor man, vainly protesting and screaming for mercy. The door closed on the struggling group, and—" Now it's your turn," the tyrant said, slapping the table and fixing his sharp cruel eyes on me. " We'll see if you'll be so quick to speak now. I doubt it, but never fear, we'll get the truth out of you ! Oh, yes,

we'll get the truth out of you, Master Englishman, or you'll go the same way. Who are you, do you hear? Or, who do you say you are? Out with it, or mind you a rope cravat is bad, but the stick is the sharper. Who are you?"

"You had better see my papers," I said, raging. And I plunged my hand into the pocket of my cloak. I might yet be in time to save the poor fellow.

"Ay! Your papers!" with a sneer, but in a tone a little more reasonable, for my coolness, I think—and I was very cool, indeed, now, having passed into the cold stage of fury—checked him. "Let's see them for what they are worth." He held out his hand for them. "Forged, I'll be bound, if you have any."

But the card was not in the pocket in which I had placed it, and I had to feel for it in a second pocket—and a third. It was in none, and I dare say that my face betrayed my surprise, for the blusterer's tone rose again. "Well, the papers? Your papers?" he repeated, malice in his eyes. "Let's see them, Mister Englishman. They must be something worth seeing, I am sure."

The card was gone! I felt and felt again, while the officer and the Frenchmen gloated over every movement. I felt in all my pockets. No, it was in none; the card was gone! And no doubt my face fell. "It has been taken from me," I said. "I had it last night. I've been robbed."

"Robbed?" the man answered in spiteful glee. "Robbed, eh? That flea won't stick in the wall! The truth is, Master Spy, you have no papers! You have no papers! But you have the impudence of the devil, and we'll see if we can't lower that a peg! Search him! Search him!" truculently. "Strip him to the skin, the rogue, and—" he broke off, turning his head. "What is it?" harshly. "Has he spoken?"

One of the men who had hustled Grüssbaum out had returned. He stooped and spoke a few words in the great man's ear: "See me alone?" the latter burst forth. "And he'll tell me all? Thousand devils, does he think that I am at his beck and call? No! Lay on, man, lay on! And then I'll see him—when you have brought him to his senses."

But this appeared to be too much for the Frenchmen's

stomachs, or it may be that they thought it wiser to take the servant's evidence before the master was heard. At any rate, one of them dropped from the table on which they were perched, and stepping to the Offizier said something to him, which I could not catch. The man snorted, and seemed for a time inclined to stand by his order, but after a rapid interchange of words he yielded. "Very well," he said sulkily, "I'll hear the rogue first. I'll hear him. And then," with a malevolent glance at me, "we shall know better, Herr Engländer, how to deal with you."

He rose with an air and swaggered out with the man who had brought the message, and to avoid the indignity of a search, which I saw was otherwise inevitable, I unbuttoned my coat and vest, and with some wriggling drew from a pocket within my shirt, where I had secreted it, Davout's passport.

I had not resorted to it at once, in part because I had determined to use it only in the last extremity, but a little also because I could only get at it by undressing myself, and I had been unwilling to do this under the Frenchmen's eyes. However, here it was—it at least had not been stolen from me, and thankful, indeed, I was that in this emergency I possessed it.

I had just succeeded in extracting it, a good deal to the amusement of the lookers-on, and I was anticipating with some zest the effect which it would produce, when the Oberst Offizier returned. But I saw with surprise that he did not return the same man he had gone out. A change, an inexplicable change, had in the short time that he had been absent, come over him.

Something or someone had cut his comb during his absence, and never did beaten cock look more small or more sullen than he, as he resumed his seat and took up his pen. That he was still bursting with spite I had no doubt; but it was equally plain that he now knew his spite to be impotent. And he looked scared. He barely raised his eyes to me, and his hand shook as he waved away the paper that I offered him.

"You can go," he said sulkily. "To the devil for all I care!" And to the Frenchmen, towards whom a

portion of his ill-humour seemed now to be directed : " A mare's nest," he growled. " A cursed mare's nest from beginning to end ! I wash my hands of it."

But naturally they were not prepared to accept this without explanation. The shift was as amazing to them as to me, and the one who had spoken before spoke up now and protested. " But Herr Oberst," he said, " if you let this man go in this way——"

" I am going to let him go."

" Then I shall report the matter," haughtily. " He is an Englishman, and whatever his business here——"

" I know his business," and the officer slapped his table with something of his old arrogance, " and that is enough. That is enough. After all, I am in charge here."

" But——"

" I am in charge here, and I have said," curtly, " all that I am going to say. If you are not satisfied, sir, you had better look at that," contemptuously. He flipped his fingers towards the paper that I still held in my hand. " It has naught to do with me. It is not directed to me, and I don't want to see it. I am satisfied."

" Well, I am not satisfied," the Frenchman replied firmly. " And I do want to see it." He held out his hand for it.

But I plunged the precious paper deep into my cloak pocket. " No," I said with equal bluntness. " That is just what you will not do. It is not directed to you, monsieur, and I do not intend to produce it to you. The police, whose conduct," with a withering glance at my enemy, " I shall report in the proper quarter, are satisfied. I have to do with no one else, and I acknowledge no other authority. I will trouble you," I continued, addressing myself to the Oberst, " to release my companion at once. If he has suffered——"

" He has not been touched," the Oberst muttered sullenly.

" That is a good thing for you, sir," I retorted. " Then let him be released if you please. And at once."

" He has gone."

" Very good. Then I take it I am free to go also."

" To the devil, if you please," he rejoined.

I took no notice of his rudeness, but buttoning up my cloak looked hardily round, with a special glare for the Frenchmen, who, completely nonplussed, did not know how to return the look. "Good morning, then, gentlemen," I said. "The matter will be reported in the proper quarter." And, turning my back on them, I plunged into the dark vaulted staircase, blundered down the steps, and pushed my way through the inquisitive crowd about the door. I crossed the tiny market-place and strode down the narrow street. I felt some exaltation. I was free. I had triumphed.

But why? Why free? I asked myself presently. How had it come about? That puzzled me, and for the time monopolized my thoughts. Whence this sudden, this unlooked-for deliverance? Had I shown Davout's safe conduct, as in another moment I should have shown it, this would have accounted for all. Triumph and freedom would no doubt have followed. But I had not shown it.

I had done nothing except protest, and I could not understand the result. Apparently—and this was all I could say—Grüssbaum had spoken and this had followed. But Grüssbaum was a stranger to me; he knew nothing, and for that reason he could have divulged nothing. For certain he knew nothing of Davout's passport, for it had never left the pocket next my skin in which I had placed it; and, the Marshal excepted, no one knew of it save the Baron and Grüner.

Ah, Grüner! I stood arrested under the old pyramidal gateway. I saw light! It must be Grüssbaum—Grüssbaum and no other, who had stolen the card, which Grüner had countersigned for me—had stolen it, and under the stress of the stick had produced it to the Oberst, owning at the same time how he had come by it. That, to be sure, would account for all.

It was, too, the only reasonable explanation, and I walked on at a slower pace, considering what I should do. To travel forward with such a man was not to be contemplated—I had suffered enough from Klatzes and their like! So, by the time I stood again within sight of the inn, I had made up my mind to dispense with my gentleman's company.

And to this day I don't know why I did not, and can attribute my failure only to weakness. But the truth was he was useful; and when I joined him he proved himself so plausible and so full of excuses that I doubted my own reasoning. When I approached the door and found the carriage waiting, and Grüssbaum in attendance, obsequiously meeting me with this and that, and in one breath assuring me that he was none the worse and regretting the inconvenience I had suffered, and in the next informing me that all was packed and ready—I put off the moment.

I could drop the man at any stage; I could rid myself of him when I stopped to eat. In a word, I got in, overcome by his fussiness and in part to save time; and he got in, and the postboys cracked their whips and we rolled away. The devil was in it if I knew what to do; the man was so useful and so plausible. But I would think. I should have plenty of time to turn the matter over.

Plenty of time? But that was just what I had not. As my thoughts reverted to the poor girl, and to the wretches who held her in their power and who had given me the slip so cleverly, I saw this! I looked at my watch. They had won a two hours' start; it was half-past nine. I thrust out my head.

We had trundled through the narrow streets of the town, and passed the swollen ford, and were now climbing the farther bank, a pack of men who had done nothing to help us running alongside and clamouring for alms. "Whip up!" I cried to the postboys, as I flung down some coppers. "Whip up and a double fee for this stage!"

They complied, or did their best to comply, for the road was infamous. And now, with the girl on my mind, I was in a fever to get on; in a fever and full of suspicion. The delay that had so favoured the Waechters' escape—had it been their work? I had seen Grüssbaum speaking to them. Was it at their instance that he had picked my pocket ot my credentials? And had they then, satisfied that I was disarmed, betrayed my nationality to the Frenchmen and left me tied by the heels?

It looked like it; so like it that with every mile my suspicions, and with them my anger, increased. When

we came to the end of the stage I bounced out, summoned Master Grüssbaum aside, and in a voice that he had not heard from me before, I bade him make a clean breast of it.

"Ay, a clean breast of it, you rascal!" I repeated, anger getting the better of me. I threatened him with my cane. "Confess, or I'll beat in your face, you rogue!" And as he recoiled in amazement before my sudden attack, "Who told you to steal that card from my pocket last night? Who? Who, you rogue? Speak out!"

He gaped at me. "*Der liebe Gott!*" he stammered. "As I live, I don't understand. I have done nothing!" And if he was not innocent he played the innocent well. "The card, your Excellency? I steal a card? Your Honour's card? As heaven sees me I don't know what the *Wohlgeborener Herr* is speaking of. What card?"

"You took my card—last night!" I retorted. "Don't deny it! Don't deny it, for I know you did. You pretended to be putting a log on the fire, you rogue!"

"As heaven sees me," he pleaded, holding out his hands, "I took no card! Did your Honour lose a card?"

"I did, and you know it. A card that was my passport!" But I spoke less violently than before, for I began to doubt. The man's surprise seemed to be genuine. "If you did not, who did?" I continued. "Who did, knave? But I know it was you. How else did you escape the stick just now?—and bring that brute of a policeman to his senses? How did you work that miracle if you had not my card?"

"Ah!" In a moment his face and, indeed, his whole demeanour underwent a change. He looked at me, humble still, but with a sly smile. "I see. I see why his Honour suspects me. But I can explain that. I can explain that, and then he will see that I am innocent, quite innocent. The Oberst was of Hamburg also, and though he did not know me, I knew him, and knew, *mein Herr*, a little thing of him; a little thing, see you, but a thing which he would not wish to be known here. I said a word in his ear, and hocus-pocus—it was over. As you see!" Then to himself, and with a secret kind of grin, "it was d—d lucky for me that I did know," he added, "that little thing. Or my back would have suffered!"

I could not tell whether to believe him or not, and "Oh," I said, "so that is your story, is it?"

"That is what happened, *mein Herr*," simply. "But as for your card, as I live, I know nothing about it."

"Yet someone took it. Someone took it from my cloak last night! If it was not you, it must have been that man—Waechter."

"Waechter? That man?" He looked at me in a puzzled fashion.

"Yes," sternly, "Waechter. And gave information to the police in order that I might not overtake him."

He looked more at sea than ever. "The Highborn wishes to overtake him?" he said.

"I do," I replied. "And I am going to overtake him."

He fingered his small chin—it had an odd perpendicular cleft in it—in an uncertain wavering way. Then, glancing up at me with a shrewder look than I had seen on his face before: "Why, honoured sir, if I may presume to ask? Why follow him? He is—of no consequence." He shrugged his shoulders. "Nothing."

"That is my business," I answered. "It is enough that I do. And now take warning, my man," I continued. "I have treated you handsomely—and all the same I doubt you. I doubt you. I am not sure even now that you have not played me false with these Waechters. But understand, at the first sign of it, I drop you in the road, and if I have the chance I will break every bone in your body besides. Now, you understand?"

He avoided my eyes, and in his abject way, scraping his foot to and fro, he protested that he was innocent—innocent as the babe unborn. "And for this man, Waechter, I know nothing of him. Your Honour knows him?" I caught another upward look—a sharp look.

"I know him for a d—d villain," I said.

"And wish to overtake him?" That seemed to stick in his gizzard—to puzzle him.

"I have said so," I retorted. "But there, the horses are in. And now it will be your business to keep the lads moving. See you do, my man, and honestly! Honestly, for if there is any breakdown I shall know whom to blame for it."

With that I bundled him in, and we took the road again —I for my part still in doubt. But I must do the man this justice—he did keep the carriage moving and the postboys awake, and we made good progress. We drove into Kyritz an hour before noon, but found that the quarry had left a full hour before, after breaking their fast—not at the Black Eagle, but at another inn.

And here I had to come to a decision. I had to choose which of two things I would do. My inquiry into Perceval's disappearance was due to start here. I had a hundred questions that I wished to put to the people at the Black Eagle. The postboys, the ostlers, the serving maid, I had meant to put them all through a fine mesh. For here at Kyritz the trail began ; here poor Ellis had embarked on his last and fatal stage.

Here he had taken the French postilion who had so completely vanished. Here he had betrayed the first, or, at any rate, the first plain symptoms of that alarm, that consciousness that his life was in danger which had been so terribly justified a few hours later at Perleberg.

But these inquiries would take up some time, and if I stayed, if I halted to make them, I lost the chance—all chance—of overtaking the Waechters ; I abandoned the victim whom they held in their hands, I deserted the hapless girl who in her despair had made to me the only appeal that lay in her power. And I had not the heart to do this.

I could not bear to do it, though to follow her was to stray from my purpose, and perhaps from my duty. I could return to Kyritz—the loss of time would not be very great ; it should at least not be fatal. But if I once let the Waechters' scent grow cold, if I allowed their party to gain some hours on me, it was unlikely that I should ever see or ever hear of their victim again.

No, I could not bear to do it ; I could not bear to desert her. For the moment I put out of my mind even the despatches, on the recovery of which so much hung—for myself and for others. I could not abandon the girl. I snatched a hasty dinner at the Black Eagle, and pushed on for Perleberg.

CHAPTER XVIII

The Inn in the Forest

But no doubt the feeling that the Waechters' business was not the only one on my hands, and that when I had accomplished that I must turn without the loss of an hour to a more important task, added to my impatience. I was in a fever to get forward, and the carriage seemed to crawl. Everything was an obstacle; everything detained us.

Where the ruts were deep we fell to a snail's pace; again we trotted, but how slowly! While every delay—and there were many delays—and every halt, necessary as it might be, set me on tenterhooks! I pictured the party in front of us travelling without let or pause. I pictured the girl's belief that I had deserted her, and her despair; and a hundred times I despaired myself, making sure that with their two hours' start they must outpace and escape me.

When Grüssbaum brought us to a standstill that he might ask some postboy if the party had passed that way, I could have cursed his officiousness; and when he repeated the act I could no longer restrain myself. "Of course they are before us!" I cried, thrusting out my head. "They are going to Hamburg, stupid! Is there another road? Push on! Push on!"

At the first post-house where we changed horses, we learned that the party still held their start. We left with a new team, the postboys bribed to a spasm of activity, and we rattled away for a while, but the ruts and the sand quickly quenched this, and it was at little more than a walk that, about three o'clock, we completed the second stage. By that time I had resigned myself to the worst, and depression had closed about me like a fog.

I was sure that the Waechters would not halt at Perleberg, but would press on through the night; and I foresaw that the moment was fast approaching when I must confront a new decision and make a new choice—the

moment when, at Perleberg, I must finally decide between duty and sympathy, between pity and hard facts. For to follow the party beyond Perleberg would be to waste hours and days ; hours and days which I could not spare and dared not waste, since they were already allotted to a task to which remorse and self-interest alike pledged me.

Sooner than I expected, and almost before I had foreseen the necessity, that choice—that very choice—was thrust upon me. As I stood impatient to be off and peevishly watching the buckling of the last strap, Grüssbaum stepped up to me. " They have not gone this way, *mein Herr*," he said.

" Not ? They've not ? " I exclaimed. " Impossible ! "

" Still, honoured sir, they have not."

" Nonsense ! These people are lying to you ! " And distrusting the man, I was instantly at a white heat. I turned about. There was a cobbler's hutch on the farther side of the road, some twenty paces beyond the post-house. A man was working in it, seated cobbler-fashion under the tiny pent-house, a shoe between his knees. " Here, you ! " I cried. " Here's a quarter-thaler for you, if you can tell me what carriages have passed since noon—going for Perleberg."

He reflected and slowly told them off. " Two *Eilwagens* and two post-carriages," he said. " Four ? No—no party of four."

" Not two men and two women ? Think, man ! You must have seen them ? "

" No. No party of four."

" Will a whole thaler open your mouth ? "

But the cobbler was more honest than I deserved to find him. He shook his head and unwillingly I had to believe him. I flung him the thaler and strode back to the carriage. Grüssbaum met me. " There is a turning half a league back which leads into the Fehrbellin-Perleberg road," he said. " They may have taken that way."

" But why ? Why, man ? " I was in no mood to agree with any one. " It must be longer and worse."

He shrugged his shoulders. " His Honour knows best," he answered meekly. " But perhaps—to evade us."

" D—n ! " I said, and I took a turn down the road, and said " D—n " again. And no wonder. If we drove straight on I might indeed intercept the Waechters at Perleberg ; but, on the other hand, they might leave the town on one side, and whether they did that or not, what might not happen in the meantime ?

Yet to leave the main road and to follow them—to commit ourselves to the infamous tracks that lost themselves among the sands and pine-forests of this outlandish country—this was a dubious and a hateful prospect. If I kept on I should reach Perleberg by nightfall or thereabouts. But if I diverged, if I committed myself to the unknown, Heaven knew where night would find us, or whether even twenty-four hours would see us in Perleberg.

I thought of my duty and I thought of the girl. I pictured poor Perceval, his face livid and damp with the dews of death, and again I touched where it lay deep in my pocket the tiny scrap of linen that had borne to me the girl's feeble cry for help. And I stood—tortured by doubt and indecision. I might lose forty-eight hours, and the loss might baulk me in my main purpose

On the other hand, I might be abandoning this child, helpless in brutal hands, to the most terrible of fates. What was I to do ? How was I to decide ? For even if I followed her, I had to remember that the chances were against me ; I might lose the track, or following it, I might never overtake the party. Their two hours' start would by the time I reached the turning they had taken have become three, and more than three ; and to come up with them by daylight might be impossible, to trace them in the dark equally impossible.

They had but to take no matter what turning ; they had but to drive aside and let me go by, and I should be hopelessly astray. In a word, I saw that the odds were immense that if I left the road to pursue the party I should do no atom of good, and only waste time that was invaluable.

I decided. I turned back to the carriage. " Well jump in," I said savagely. " Let them go to the devil ! "

" His Honour goes on ? "

"Where else? In! Get in, man! Let us lose no more time."

He held the door, I sprang in. He closed it and bundled up in front. The postboys sounded their horns and cracked their whips, the ostlers stepped aside. I flung out a *douceur*. We set out.

But I suffered. God knows how I suffered and what piteous visions I had as I turned my back on the girl; what dumb appeals wrung my heart, what pangs of conscience tormented me! I suffered, and when we had travelled a mile I could bear it no longer. I put out my head, I ordered the horses' heads to be turned, and even while, writhing on the horns of this cursed dilemma, I called myself every kind of fool for my softness, I drove back to the post-house. There, of course, I had to confront a wrangle.

The postmaster had no mind to let out his team for the by-roads—I must pay treble, I must pay double, I must take at least a cock-horse. But I was in no temper to be browbeaten, and in the end, now bribing and now bullying, I got my will, and we travelled back to the by-road of which Grüssbaum had informed me. There we confirmed the fact that a calash had recently turned off, and we followed its traces at the best speed that we could compass.

An hour, two hours passed; we were still toiling on, and we had seen nothing and heard nothing of our quarry. Hours I knew must elapse before we could hope to see anything of it, and meantime night was beginning to close in—and on what a scene! The district which we were traversing, a part of that tongue of land which Brandenburg thrusts in between the jaws of the Danish and Mecklenburg marches, is one of the most desolate in Europe.

A barren waste, broken here and there by ragged thickets, with ever—at hand or on the horizon—a dark wall of forest, a man may traverse it for hours by day without seeing a human being, and from sunset to dawn without espying a lighted window. Such wretched hamlets and famine-stricken farms as there are lie hidden in hollows and parted by wide spaces. The inns, where

there are inns, are cut-throat hovels ; and here, as in all marchlands where jurisdictions meet, outlaws gather and prey, or would prey, were there anything to steal.

The sand clogs the toiling wheels, fallen trees cumber the forest road, the signposts are gibbets ; and, as in the wilds of Livonia, men tremble as they pass, lest in the pinewoods beside them the wolves give tongue.

Something of a road we kept, and to this I had to trust. But as the twilight fell and veiled the melancholy landscape, while our progress grew ever more laboured, I had leisure, and, alas ! only too much leisure, to reflect what a fool I had been, on what a goose-chase I had started, what a Jack-o'-lanthorn I was pursuing ! Even the opinion of Grüssbaum began to have its weight with me, and for the lads I had hardly the face, so foolish seemed my expedition, to ask them if they were still in the road.

In a word I found time to repent a dozen times. *Que faisais-je dans cette galère,* I asked myself—I, who had my task laid down and ordained for me, without one hour to spare if I would do my duty and let no chance slip ? To search for Ellis, to search for the despatches, ten days had been little for this ; the enterprise had been desperate, the odds against me had I spent every minute and every thought upon the search ! And here was I wandering from the road and from my purpose—wandering benighted in the fog and mist of this barren Sahara ! Had ever diplomatist, even the unlucky Drake, even poor Spencer Smith, played the *fat* so completely ?

I have seldom lived through four hours of sorer vexation. We had gone too far to return, yet toiling forward saw with every mile less hope. Flakes of snow, too, were beginning to fall from a grey sky, not a landmark showed, and the horses tugging at the traces laboured on ever more slowly.

But all things come to an end at last, and we had left the open moor and were plodding along between black lines of pine-trees, when on a sudden I sat up. The postilion had sounded his horn ! I thrust out my head, hope reviving. I tried to pierce the gloom with my eyes, but for the moment I could see nothing except eddying flakes falling slowly and softly. Then, as the carriage

swerved to one side, I perceived what had drawn the postboy's greeting.

A single, steady, lonely light shone before us. Anon it vanished as we sank into a hollow; it appeared again, again I lost it. But when it peeped out for the third time we were close upon it, and a minute later we drew up before a dark mass of a house, set in an angle between two roads—two of four that met in a desolate clearing a little, but very little, lighter than the sombre woods that hemmed it in on every side.

Before Grüssbaum could open the door, I was out of the carriage and in the road, savagely intent on getting forward. For so much at least we had done; and now to eat and to drive on, or to drive on without the loss of a minute—either would suit me. Meantime, as I stamped my chilled feet on the road I wondered that no one came out to receive us, and I looked at the house. It stood lonely and gloomy, with pine-woods all about it, but it bulked large.

Its size promised well, and impatiently I strode to the door and tried it, and shook it. It proved to be unfastened, and throwing it back I entered. "House! House!" I cried—damn the folks, what were they about? Were they all asleep? What was the use of a horn if no attention was paid to it? "House, within!" again. "Do you hear?"

But I had hardly crossed the threshold before my hopes sank, and I guessed that the single light that we had espied measured the position more correctly than my expectations. My call, echoing through empty rooms, awoke only echoes. The air of the house smelled musty and damp, the cold took me by the throat, the stone-floored passage rang hollow.

And when I shouted again and a man at length appeared from some hidden recess, and came, bearing a light, down the long tunnel-like passage towards us, I saw before me, no hearty civil Boniface, but a dirty unshaven lump of a clown whose sodden visage matched his frowsy blouse.

A relay? In half an hour? The man laughed sourly, eyeing us, for Grüssbaum had joined me, with covert insolence. He had but one nag in the stable. The

gentleman should have given notice if he wanted a relay. Since the war there were no travellers on the road, and such as there were passed him by.

"But you are the postmaster!" I stormed. "You are the postmaster!"

"I'm all the postmaster there is," he answered sulkily. "I've a team, and that's a team too many. But it went out four hours agone."

Were there no horses to be hired in the neighbourhood? No, there was no neighbourhood, he answered, and no horses. And no traffic either, not so much as a louse could live by. The war had killed it—and the taxes. It was no use for the gentleman to be angry—he could not make horses, no more than another. Of course, the gentleman could stay if he pleased, but it was a poor place nowadays.

Supper? Well, he had nothing that was ready—the house was empty. The next posthouse? Towards-Perleberg? A German mile and perhaps a bit, and a good road; a much better road, the Fehrbellin-Perleberg road, if the gentry preferred to go on.

"It's two German miles—and a long bit," Grüssbaum muttered in my ear. "Ten English miles."

I did not at once see the bearing of this—of an understatement so unlike an innkeeper—but I put the same question that I should have put if I had seen it: "You had a party came in this afternoon, hadn't you?"

"Yes, *mein Herr*—for a wonder," with a grimace. "Four persons. They took my team and went on."

"For Perleberg?"

"That way. Four hours ago." He cast the light of the candle he was carrying on the face of a clock fixed to the wall beside him, for all this time we were standing in the chill discomfort of the bare, stone-floored passage. "They should be there by now."

It seemed to be a full stop. I felt myself beaten, and I dare say that my face showed it. But as the man had said, he could not make horses, and ours were worn out. To proceed with them was impossible, and with a silent curse at my folly I gave up the struggle. "Well," I said peevishly, "get fire and lights. And be stirring,

man! Move yourself. Can't you see that we are half-frozen? And supper! Something, anything, as soon as you can!"

"You stop then, *mein Herr*?"

"Of course we stop," I cried irascibly. "What else can we do if you have no horses? And be moving, man. A fire first—is this the room?" I pushed open a door. "*Gott im Himmel*, what a vault! And then, supper—do you hear? And be airing beds for us. No wonder you've little custom if you have no better welcome for travellers than this!"

He grumbled something that I did not catch, and looked at me by no means pleasantly, but in the end he obeyed, snuffed his light and set it down on the table, and went sluggishly away. Grüssbaum had gone out before him to hasten matters, and there was nothing for me to do but to pace up and down the bare, melancholy room.

The walls, coloured a dismal blue, and damp-stained in places, gave out the chill of the grave, and I shivered as I walked, even in my fur cloak. By and by, but it might well have been sooner, a squalid old woman brought in a tray of embers and started the fire in the stove, and with vengeful extravagance I piled on wood from a heap in a corner.

And how my spirits sank as I fed the blaze and owned myself defeated! I had led into the enemy's hand, and he had trumped me; he had drawn me off the road and left me planted here, while he pursued his way unmolested and triumphant. Nor could any reflection be more mortifying, any thought more poignant than the certainty I now felt that if I had clung to the main road I should have been in Perleberg before him and might have intercepted him and his prey at my leisure.

By and by the old hag came in again, and removing the dip, set a pair of guttering candles in its place, while I, drawing up a stool, crouched before the open door of the stove, and now cursed my folly and now tried to beat the logs into a fiercer blaze. A silence as of death held the house—anything less like a house of entertainment, anything more funereal I had never in all my journeyings happened upon; and the thought of the desolate forest

without, stretching for miles on every side, did but darken the picture. It was a relief when at last I heard a step coming down the passage, and looked behind me. Here was at last some sign of life, and, I hoped, of supper.

But it was only Grüssbaum, and disappointed I moved to give the man a share of the heat.

"Pull up a chair," I said ungraciously. "A more God-forsaken place than this I never saw!"

He did not comply, but instead, and after a moment's pause, "I've been down the road," he said.

I was in no mood to do anything but snub him, but something in his tone led me to look at him, and I perceived a change in the man; such a change as I had noticed once before. He had shed his meekness, his voice had gathered force, and either there was a gleam of excitement in his eyes or the leaping blaze, that issued from the open stove, deceived me. At any rate, "Down the road?" I queried, in place of what I had meant to say. "Why? Why, man?"

"I took a lanthorn—from the carriage."

I stared at him. "Well?"

"There's no trace of wheels along the Perleberg road. Nor along either of the other roads."

"So! And you fancy——"

"I fancy," with a glance at the door, "that your friends are here, *mein Herr*."

"Here?" I stood up, in my surprise.

"Here, or hereabouts," he rejoined. "And if that be so, I would advise his Honour to say nothing, but to keep his eyes open."

But I was in too low a mood to preserve any hope, and I laughed. "Why there's not a sound in the house!" I said. "Rubbish! Rubbish, man!"

"Still, they've not gone on, I am sure," he persisted. "And there's a hamlet five furlongs away on the Fehrbellin road. They may have walked to it."

"Much more likely that the snow has effaced their wheel-marks!" I retorted. "No, man, I don't believe a word of it. Depend upon it they are half-way to Perleberg by now, and if I had not been all sorts of a fool I should have been there before them. Instead of spinning

these fine yarns, my friend, suppose you go and urge on the supper. I am more interested in that than in your theories."

For really this was too much! To be advised by this man whom I had taken up out of charity! It was a reversal of our positions a little too sudden. And I suppose Grüssbaum saw that he had presumed, for he became again the suppliant of the barrier, meek, subdued, and uncertain of himself. "Of course," he stammered "if the *gnädiger Herr* thinks that there is nothing in what I say——"

"I do," I answered sharply. "I am sure that there is nothing. Do you see about the supper, man. That's your work."

But he had sown the seeds of suspicion in my mind, and no sooner was he gone than I began to turn over what he had said, and very uncomfortable it made me. I was sure that there was nothing in it, and yet I could not rest. I caught myself listening, suspecting, glancing over my shoulder. The gloom of the room, with its bare table and its mouldering walls, took on a lowering aspect. The long echoing passages throbbed with unseen possibilities.

The stillness, the chill, the unreadiness veiled a mystery, demanded explanation. I fancied strange things passing in the depths of this dark silent house, and when the landlord at last appeared and sluggishly proceeded to lay a coarse cloth on the end of the table, I watched him covertly. But his glum face told nothing; it was a stolid mask, and I still swung between uncertainties. He went and came, and it was not until he brought in a covered dish, and the smell of roast meat restored the commonplace, that I shook off the obsession.

As I rose to go to the table, and Grüssbaum sneaked in, "What time did you say that that party left?" I asked, fixing my eyes on the landlord's face.

"With the horses, *mein Herr*?"

"To be sure," sharply. "What other party had you?"

"It would be about two."

We sat down with that, Grüssbaum at a little distance from me and making himself as small as he could. The landlord removed the cover. Roast veal, of course.

I carved, sitting with my back to the stove, and the man carried a plateful to Grüssbaum. I helped myself and ordered a stoup of beer to be brought for Grüssbaum and a bottle of Rhine wine for myself. We heard the man go down the empty passage, and ordinarily I should have made some remark to my companion. But I was vexed with him ; the appearance of the meal had dispelled my doubts, and I maintained a displeased silence. The clatter of our knives alone broke it. We plied them briskly, our eyes on our plates.

Presently we heard the landlord's returning steps, and, still a little suspicious, I looked up. A second later—it could have been no more—Grüssbaum glanced up also, his knife suspended in the air. Our eyes met. We had caught—both of us—a sound other than that which the man's footsteps made ; a light tinkling sound, that even his tramp across the wooden floor, as he came up the room with the wine, did not quite cover. It was the musical ring of bells on a dog's collar.

The man—perhaps he was a little dull of ear—did not detect the sound that followed him until he halted to place the bottle and stoup on the table. Then it reached him and, with a muttered exclamation and more activity than I should have expected, he wheeled about and stared at the door. He saw then what we also saw : a tiny white dog standing in the middle of the dark doorway and looking into the room with bright eyes. One moment we viewed the creature, and then with a sharp curse and a rush of feet the man drove it from the door and pursued it down the passage.

" Azor ! " I exclaimed. " Good Lord ! "

" Colossal ! " Grüssbaum muttered, his eyes still on the doorway, his ears cocked. " Azor ! So they are here, *mein Herr*, right enough."

" Thank God ! " I sighed. " Then I have them."

He shook his head. " I am afraid," he rejoined, " that it won't be as easy as that."

CHAPTER XIX

The Crack in the Shutters

Within twenty minutes—we could hardly sacrifice less to the meal and appearances—we had formed our plan; and of those twenty minutes it is not too much to say that I had been forced to devote ten to the enlistment of Grüssbaum. The man had every reason to be grateful to me, and I every ground to expect unquestioning aid from him. But I did not get it.

He evinced, on the contrary, a reluctance which by and by developed into a mulish obstinacy; and it was necessary for me not only to go into the facts with him—at some cost of pride, the man being so poor a creature and, as I thought, so entirely at my disposal—but to set out the girl's miserable position, and even to dwell upon her possible fate in a manner little to my taste.

Even when I had done this, the man—d—n him—was far from kindling; and of generous indignation he betrayed not a trace. Instead, he hummed, he hawed, he fidgeted, and as we sat, our heads together in the circle of light shed by the wretched candles, with the eyes of one or the other ever on the door, which we had not ventured to close lest we should awaken suspicion, his hesitation was as plain to me as it seemed cowardly. True, the rogue *faisait mine d'avoir le cœur sensible*; but it was so ill done that I saw that he did not care a jot for the girl, and whether he did or no, that he had no will to comply with my wishes.

"So!" he muttered. "Sad, to be sure, *mein Herr*! Very sad! *Wunderbar*! But, fortunately, it is not as if the young lady were a friend of the *Wohlgeborener Herr*? Or as if—" imploring patience by a gesture—"a letter to Her Highness the Grand Duchess would not——"

I cut him short. "Would not—what?" I retorted. "What good would a letter do, man? And while the letter was travelling to Zerbst, what do you think would be happening to the young lady? And where would she be when the answer came?"

He could not reply to that. There was no reply. But his mouth remained as obstinately set as before. "To be sure! To be sure, that is so," he agreed humbly. "His Excellency must know. He is the best judge. And if he were in his own country"—with a sly upward glance—"it might be his duty to set other things aside——"

"Duty!" I took him up short. "You'll leave me to decide on my duty, sir, if you please," I cried. "That is my business."

"Of course!" he assented smoothly. "Of course!" fingering the cloth and keeping his eyes fixed on it. "But I thought that the Herr's business compelled him to be at Perleberg——"

But I could not suffer that—the pig! "D—n your impudence, man," I exclaimed, "My duty and my business!" staring at him: "What are you talking about? What are they to you? I picked you up out of charity, and you preach to me! *Gott im Himmel*, have done! Have done! Do you hear? And bend your mind to this. Are you going to help me or are you not? That is the only question for you!"

"Oh, dear, dear!" he stammered, shaking his head. "*Enter das Weib* and *exit die Weisheit!*" And as I scowled at this fresh impertinence, "Who aims at two stools falls between both!"

"If you mouth me," I cried, enraged by his persistence, "one more proverb——"

But he was irrepressible. "Who pushes on wins; who breaks back, loses!" he murmured, shaking his head at the cloth.

It seemed impossible to stay his tongue except by force, and, "In one word," I asked in despair, "are you going to help me? Or must I act alone?"

He fingered his cleft chin in a pitiable state of perplexity, and it seemed to me that it was just the turn of a coin whether he persisted in his obstinacy or no. But of a sudden he seemed to make up his mind, and with a final shrug which disclaimed responsibility, he gave way. "Very well, *mein Herr*, if it must be so," he said, and he sighed, "I will do what you order—what must be, must

be." But having once yielded, I am bound to say that he gave no further trouble, but, on the contrary, showed a quickness of grasp and a readiness to play his part that a good deal surprised me.

Ten minutes later, the landlord being in the room, I made the discovery that I had lost one of my fur-lined gloves, and I bade the sulky fellow see if I had dropped it in the hall. He took out one of our candles and searched for it, but, of course, he did not find it. On that: "Do you look—look outside," I commanded Grüssbaum; "I may have dropped it as I stepped out of the *calèche*."

He rose to do so, and the landlord, who had secured the outer door, had to unbar it. "If it is not there," I called after Grüssbaum, "see if it is in the carriage. And don't come back without it!" I added, peevishly. "It must be somewhere."

As I had calculated, the landlord did not refasten the door—he was moving in and out, clearing the table. And I took care to keep him busy; now ordering another bottle of wine and now bidding him bring more wood and see that a brazier was taken to my room, if there was no stove in it. When the man returned after seeing to this, I still held him a minute or two in talk, and then sent him out with a message to the postboys, enjoining haste in the morning. We would start at six to the minute.

Altogether I kept the fellow employed for fifteen minutes by my watch, and then, assured that Grüssbaum should have reached the police-station at the hamlet, I found one more errand for my sluggish friend, and while he was about it, I slipped into my cloak and stepping softly out of the house, I pulled the door to after me.

The slight snowfall had ceased and, though there was no moon, the stars were shining in a frosty sky. The house stood, as I have said, in a clearing at the point where four roads met. Its front looked on the road by which we had come, but its flank, prolonged by the stables, ran along the Fehrbellin road. Having ascertained this, I went no farther towards the stables, for though the air was keen there might be loiterers in the yard, and the last thing I wished was to be seen.

The Waechters, we had decided, if they were not harboured upstairs, must be tucked away at the back, and my aim was to reach the rear by passing round the nearer flank of the house, where the forest, dwindling at close quarters to stumps and isolated trees, still pressed in close to the building. It was not only that this was the quieter side, but I calculated that the light which we had viewed as we approached, and which was not visible from the road before the house, must proceed from some window on this side.

I had not felt my way a dozen yards, keeping within a pace or two of the house, before I tripped over a wood-pile and got a heavy fall. I was bruised and shaken, but not much hurt, and fortunately my fur cloak deadened the sound—fortunately, I say, for I had not, moving with greater care, gone more than another ten paces before there shone across my path a broad beam of light; probably the one that had greeted our arrival.

It issued, as far as I could see, from a building lower than the body of the house, and it was hidden from the eyes of any one standing before the inn by a projecting chimney-breast. As I stole on towards it, trying every step before I took it, I passed a casement, from a crack in the shutter of which there also issued a thin arrow of light; but intent on the farther window, which I judged to be unshuttered, I passed by this, using the utmost caution as I did so.

I reached the one on which my hopes of learning something rested. But here I experienced a moment of acute disappointment. The sill of the window was a couple of feet above my head, and I could discern no more of the room than the rafters and laths—in some places stripped of plaster—of a grimy and smoke-blackened ceiling. I lurked awhile and listened, but caught no sound. I tried if retreating a little way from the window would help me, and I succeeded in bringing a part of the walls within sight.

Still, I could see neither light nor occupant, and I drew back farther, only to come unexpectedly and sharply against a tree-stump. The collision might well have hurt me, but it was destined to help me, for quickly—the

stump was about three feet high—I climbed upon it, balanced myself with care, and with my eyes raised above the sill, I looked into the room.

I could not have been better placed, for two of the occupants of the place were directly within my line of sight, and they were the women whom I had hoped to see. The girl lay on a bed, her face hidden, her clasped hands stretched nervelessly before her, her whole attitude eloquent of fatigue and dejection. A few feet from her Frau Waechter sat beside the light, her face turned towards the bed, her features set in deep thought. She was watching her companion, and watching her with a strange, intent, brooding look which I found it hard to translate, yet which instinctively filled me with apprehension.

It was not so much that her gaze, her very stillness seemed to me sinister, but I read in her look a kind of shrinking, as if the woman saw what she did not wish to see, and, evil as she was, shuddered at the picture called up by her thoughts. If the girl on whom she looked had lain a corpse before her, and a corpse through her act, then I could have understood that look—it was so I could have fancied her gazing on her handiwork and trembling in her soul. For as she saw the girl now—so I could imagine her thinking—she would see her in her dreams.

But, thank God, that fancy was not justified; the girl was, at any rate, alive. I saw her move, though ever so slightly, and I fancied that she sighed or groaned. She was not dead, and, thank Heaven, we were here to save her. Of the men of the party I could see nothing, and presently, with the same care with which I had climbed up, I descended. I stole back towards the front of the inn. Grüssbaum should have returned by this time, and not a minute longer than was necessary would I leave the girl in the power of these people.

But as I passed the other window the tiny arrow of light which shone from a crack in the shutters tempted my curiosity. It might be well to know what was passing there also, and it would delay me but a moment to do so, for the window was lower than the other—so low, that to

bring my eye to the chink, which was at the foot of the shutter, I had to stoop.

Once I had looked in, I remained, fascinated as well as puzzled, by what I saw. The two men were there, but what in the world were they doing? Waechter was on his feet beside a bare wooden table, holding, of all the strange things I could think of, a large iron spoon in his hand, while his eyes dwelt intently on something about which the dwarf, seated at the table, was busy. What this was I could not for a while make out. But by and by the lad moved and disclosed his work.

He was sawing off, laboriously and with a common table-knife, the thin end of—again of all strange things—a tin extinguisher! I had hardly grasped the fact, when the tip of the thing came off, and laying it aside, he held the extinguisher to his eye. After looking through it he handed it to his companion, who also examined it, measuring, as it seemed to me, the size of the hole which had been made. Still unsatisfied, he followed suit by peering through it, then he thrust it—and this I thought oddest of all—into his ear. As he did so I caught through window and shutter a faint sound—the harsh, jarring laugh of the dwarf.

What, what on earth were they doing? I could not conceive, and though time pressed, and I knew that Grüssbaum might be waiting for me in the road, I could not drag myself away with my curiosity unsated. I must unriddle the riddle if it were possible. I must see more. And for more I had not long to wait, though it enlightened me little. Waechter laid down the extinguisher and took up in its stead the iron spoon.

He wrapped a cloth about the handle, and placing something in the bowl of the spoon, he held the bowl in the flame of the lamp which lighted them. The lad rose to his feet that he might see the better, and the two, stooping and intent, pored over the spoon.

They were heating something, or possibly melting something. But what was it? What could it all mean? What were they going to do? Though I shivered, cloaked as I was, in the keen frosty air, I could not draw myself away. I must see it out. I watched, and at length the

operation, whatever it was, came to an end, and Karl moved away. He brought a piece of wood from a corner and laid it on the table.

Then he took up the funnel, which he had made out of the extinguisher, and protecting the hand in which he held it with a corner of the cloth, he poised the thing, thin end downwards, over the wood. Waechter removed the spoon from its position in the flame and quickly, but carefully, poured the contents of the bowl into the funnel. I imagined—but I was not sure—that as he tilted the spoon I caught the gleam of metal.

Then—nothing happened; and I drew the conclusion that the experiment had failed, for I caught the sound of an oath and an exclamation of disappointment. Baffled, for I could make nothing of what I had seen, I substituted ear for eye, pressed it against the hole, and caught the words "pewter—cools—quickly!" And then the word "lead." But I could make little of that either, and I could wait no longer. I crept softly away, and emerged a few seconds later on the road, where I found Grüssbaum and a couple of men awaiting me in front of the inn. I joined them.

"Come," I said. "I have seen them, and they are here." In a dozen words I explained where they were.

"That will be the old house," one of the men, who appeared to be the chief, decided. "We must go through the kitchen. There is no other way to it."

"Then let us go," I said. "We have lost enough time already," though, indeed, the lost time lay at my door.

"But steady, *mein Herr*, steady a moment, if you please," the policeman rejoined. "We don't want to get into trouble. *Gott bewahre!* You are sure, I suppose, that this young woman——"

"I am sure that these people have carried her off by force," I answered warmly. "I am prepared to swear to that." And I explained as shortly as I could who she was, and her position in the Grand Duchess's household—which impressed the man, as that kind of thing does impress Germans. "And this man and woman," I continued, "by whatever means they have got her into their power, mean no good by her. They are the lowest

of the low; criminals, adventurers—I am sure of that—everything of the worst."

The man nodded. "So!" he commented. "So! Well, *mein Herr*, we will hear what they say."

But he spoke in more measured tones than I liked, and I was annoyed. Still, in action he showed himself strenuous enough. We found the inn door on the latch, and we entered; but I fancied only just in time, for we caught the landlord making away from us down the dark passage, a light in his hand.

The officer called to him to wait; we overtook him, and without ceremony we pushed by him and through a dirty neglected kitchen to a door in the farther wall. The officer knocked on this, and at once the little dog within began to bark. We heard persons moving, but no one answered the summons, and our man tried the door and found it locked. He called on those inside to open, and at the same time he thrust at the door with his knee.

"What is it?" cried an angry voice, amid the shrill barking of the dog. "What do you want? *Tausend Teufel*, are we never to be at rest!"

"We are the police!" the officer returned, and he shook the door again. "Do you hear, open! Open!"

"But what is it? What——"

"Open! Open at once! Admit us, or we break in the door!"

"Patience! Patience! We are doing it!" Quickly the key was turned, the door thrown back. "What is the matter?"

I had looked, I own, to find them cringing, panic-stricken, criminals caught in the act. But they confronted us with surprising boldness, even with anger; and the woman in particular—no doubt the delay had allowed her time to enter—stood forward and challenged us haughtily. "What is the matter?" she asked. She had plucked up the dog and held it in her arms, where it cuddled, darting from time to time angry whines at us. "Why are we disturbed? What is the meaning of this? If you are really police——"

"We are," the officer said sharply. "We are in search

of a young woman who is said to be with you, *meine Frau*."

The woman stared at him in well-acted surprise. "Do you mean my daughter?" she exclaimed. "She is the only young woman with us."

I thrust myself forward. "She is not your daughter," I said. "And we are here to remove her and to restore her to her family."

"Ah!" The woman looked viciously at me, and Azor shot out a shrill bark. "It's you, is it? Now I understand. You who persecuted her before! The Englishman."

"No matter who I am," I retorted. "We are here to free the young lady, to whom you have no right."

"No right?" She laughed in scorn, defying us all, denouncing me—and I am bound to own that the woman was a consummate actress. "No right to my own daughter? And you'll take her out of my hands? You will free her, will you? No, sir, not while there is law in this country. Why, for sheer impudence—do you think that I do not know who you are? You, who persecuted the girl in Berlin, who had the insolence to follow her to her mother's room and would have dragged her even from there! But I was alone then, and I am not alone now. "Her father is here, and he will deal with you. And you, *mein Herr*"—turning to the officer—"have a care what you do. This man who has imposed on you is, I tell you, an Englishman. An Englishman and a spy. And I denounce him in your hearing. You have heard me!"

The officer eyed me doubtfully. He was evidently shaken. "I don't know about that," he said. "But anyway, the gentleman is prepared to swear that the young woman is not your daughter, and that you are detaining her by force."

"Not my daughter!" the woman cried. "Not my daughter? Then who is she?"

He told her, and asked where the girl was.

"In her bed," she retorted defiantly. "Where else should she be at this hour? And there she stays."

"Well, I must have your papers," the man replied.

"Then I'll see. Produce them, *mein Herr*," he continued, addressing the man, who had seated himself in a nonchalant attitude on the table—the table at which I had seen him make that strange experiment! "Who are you, and whence do you come? And why"—with a sharp look round the wretched room with its rotting plaster and mean pallets—"why, I ask you, are you here?"

"To escape that man, whom we knew to be following us," Waechter replied, pointing to me. "He has followed my daughter, Walburga, from Berlin—has followed her for days—and for no good, as you may imagine. But we wanted no trouble with him, and we came here to be out of his way, though it is not comfortable."

"Well, anyway, your papers," the man announced shortly. "Let me see them."

Waechter put his hand into his breast-pocket. "Willingly," he said. "Of course. With pleasure. But——" he paused. He looked at me and I caught a gleam of triumph—of spiteful, malicious triumph in his eyes. "Not before that man. You will see why, officer, when I produce the papers."

The policeman looked at me. I could see that doubt was becoming suspicion. "Are you English?" he asked.

I admitted it.

"So! Then I think the man has reason. You will retire, *mein Herr*, if you please."

"But," I rejoined, standing my ground, "his papers may be in order, but that won't make the young lady his daughter. She is not his daughter! I swear it! And I am the accuser. I claim the right to be present."

He shook his head. "I am the judge of that," he said.

"At any rate, ask the young lady. Ask her in my presence who she is," I urged.

But he had made up his stolid mind, and my remonstrances only set him against me. "I have decided," he said. He pointed to the door. "You will retire, *mein Herr*. If you do not, I give up the matter."

Baffled, already scenting defeat, I saw that there was nothing else for it, and I yielded with an ill grace. I

went out, Grüssbaum with me. The two policemen remained in the room. They closed the door on us.

Outside, in the squalid noisome kitchen lighted by a single candle, and with the landlord scowling at us from the hearth, I glared at Grüssbaum. "Why didn't you prime them?" I growled. "And why didn't you speak up? You are no use. If you had said a word, if you had backed me up! But the man is a fool!"

But Grüssbaum only shook his head, and of all the people I have ever met, he could be the most depressing. His very stoop, the droop of his shoulders invited defeat. And we waited, I, for my part, in hot anger, which as the minutes passed gave place to despair. The rogues had the man's ear, and what use might they not make of it? He was a raw country policeman, dull and stupid, and doubtful of me as a foreigner! They might impose on him, bribe him, even browbeat him! And the woman was clever and plausible, capable of that and more than that.

Yet I might have had no fears, so much did the issue surpass them. After a long delay I heard a hand on the latch, the door fell ajar, I stepped forward to enter. But instead of admitting me, the men came out, signed sternly to me to stand back, and closed the door behind them. I heard the key turned in the lock. "Well?" I cried. "What have you learned? What is it?"

"A cock-and-bull story," growled the chief, eyeing me with anything but friendly looks. "Trouble for nothing! A cock-and-bull story—or worse."

"But, heaven and earth, man," I remonstrated, "you can't mean to leave the girl? I am prepared to swear that she is not their daughter."

"Their daugther? Piff!" He cracked his fingers contemptuously. "If she is not, what business is it of yours? I'll trouble you for your papers, Mr. Englishman."

"Fiddlesticks!" I cried, carried away by the thought of the girl left helpless and hopeless in that woman's hands. "Fiddlesticks, man! Don't talk nonsense! And have a care! I call on you to go back into that room and release that girl. I tell you she is not their daughter, and I am prepared to swear it."

"Your papers! Your papers!" was his only answer. He held out his hand.

I confess it with shame—a boy in his teens could not have acted more foolishly. In the heat of my chagrin I lost my temper and I thrust the man's hand aside. It was hardly more than a gesture; it certainly was not a blow, but it was enough. In a twinkling he drew his clumsy hanger, and, "I arrest you! I arrest you for resistance to lawful authority," he shouted, red with anger. "And I call on you"—to the now grinning landlord—"to witness that this man has resisted me in my duty. To the lock-up, *mein Herr*! To the lock-up!" pushing me towards the door. "You will sleep without sheets to-night!"

"Oh, dear, oh, dear!" cried Grüssbaum, almost weeping. "It was but an accident, Herr Offizier. The Herr meant nothing. Nothing! He is a stranger. He does not understand——"

"Nevertheless, to the lock-up he goes," the man rejoined truculently. "And you too, my little cock; you, too, if I have more of it. We'll search him there. Come, my gentleman, be moving unless you want a stroke over the head! On! on! Without words, Herr Engländer!"

I was sober now; sober enough to know that I had played into the enemy's hands and made a foe of the one ally to whom I could look for aid. And that was bad, though, possessing a talisman equal to the crisis, I had no fear for myself. As the officer, with his hand on my shoulder, urged me along the passage, "Wait! wait, my friend, a moment," I said. "You had better look at my papers first." And I sought to get at that inner pocket in which I kept my precious safe conduct. For I saw that if I did not wish to face an unpleasant night at the police office, I must produce it.

But, "No, at the lock-up!" cried the arbitrary one, continuing to push me along. "On! Don't trouble yourself! We will see what you have about you at the lock-up."

"Still, for you own sake," I protested. "You'll find it wiser——"

And then, most unexpectedly, Grüssbaum intervened. He laid a hand on the officer's arm, gabbled something in his ear, caught his attention, drew him aside. The two muttered together, the policeman suspicious, but taken aback. A moment, and they retired into a corner of the kitchen, and with their backs to us, while the other man remained to guard me, they conferred together.

The result surprised me. The officer emerged from the corner looking considerably abashed. "Well, I'll look it over for this time, *mein Herr*," he muttered sulkily. "But be less quick with your hands another time, or you'll be in trouble. Come"—to his subordinate—"we've done here—nothing in it!" And with a half salute, made, it seemed to me, against his will, he stalked off down the passage, leaving me a free man.

And a very bewildered man! It was like nothing so much as the turn-over by which in a Punch and Judy show the executioner of one moment becomes the culprit of the next. I looked at Grüssbaum. "Man alive!" I cried. "How the devil did you do it?"

"Ah," he said, and with a sly look he laid the fingers of one hand in the palm of the other. "That way. That way, honoured sir. I knew that you would not see me a loser. The Waechters showed him, I fancy, your card. The card you lost. But another time *mein Herr* must not, craving pardon, lose his temper, as well as his card."

"Temper!" I cried. "If you knew!" And again I thought of the girl and shuddered. And halfway along the dark tunnel of a passage, I paused. Why not? The means that Grüssbaum had used, why should I not use them. Hurriedly I reckoned up the money I had, the balance of the sum which the Grand Duke had provided for my journey. I had much of it left, and, at any rate, I might try. True, it was an ignoble way to success, but if it succeeded where other ways had failed? I turned to Grüssbaum, took him by the shoulder, faced the astonished man about.

"Go back to the Waechters!" I said. "Make them open to you, do you hear? Get speech with them; tell them that I have an offer to make to them—that they have nothing to fear! Tell them it is to their

advantage to see me. Go, go now! Do it at once. Lose not a minute, man!"

"You are going to bribe them, *mein Herr*?" he said. There were times when the creature was strangely sharp-witted. "Yet consider, honoured sir, the girl is nothing to you, and——"

"Go! Go!" I answered, pushing him on his way. "That's my business, man! Do you do as I bid you! That's your business. And take no refusal. Get me speech with them or——"

"Enough!" he said, and shrugged his shoulders. And he went, though I could see that he went *à contre cœur*. However, I cared nothing for that, for there, in the darkness of the passage, had risen before my eyes a picture, or rather a series of pictures, so vivid and so startling that I shuddered as I viewed them. As plainly as I had seen the thing with the bodily eye, I saw those mouldering damp-stained rooms, shut away at the back of this gloomy echoing house—so shut away that no cry from within, no call for help, could issue from them.

I saw again the greedy faces that pored over that mysterious, that sombre experiment; I heard again the jarring crazy laugh of the half-witted lad. Once more I watched the dark brooding countenance of the woman as, her chin resting on her hand, she gazed with fearful intent on the hapless form prone on the bed—gazed and saw, I was sure, things invisible to me! And whether the vile surroundings coloured my thoughts, or worn down by my long journey I yielded to imagination, I seemed to touch the skirts of some horror, some deed which shook me even as I strove vainly to comprehend it.

And then—I had another vision; of the pure oval of that face that, limned on the canvas—ah, God, in a scene so different!—had struck my fancy and attracted me. I recalled the face as I had first seen it; the spacious airy chamber bright with sunlight and humming with summer scents; the garden without, and the Terrace; and comparing that scene with my latest impression, comparing it with that form cast in hopeless abandonment on the ragged couch, I shook with rage.

So much so, that I have no recollection of Grüssbaum's

return, or of anything that passed until I found myself once more face to face with the three, the door closed behind us. And how, with the impression of those sinister visions still upon me, I hated them! How I longed to cast myself upon them! But with the need sobriety returned, and as I looked from one greedy face to another I bade myself be prudent. Force had failed; I was here to try another way, and already I fancied that they foresaw that way. To manœuvre was useless, and, "It has come to this," I said curtly. "What will you take for the girl?"

The woman smiled vilely. She for one had certainly foreseen my errand. But she knew her part by heart, and "For my daughter?" she sneered, holding the dog to her breast and soothing it. "I am to sell her, then, am I? My daughter? I am to sell her to you, young man, am I! Ay, and turn——"

"Silence!" I said. "Silence, woman! You may discard all that. We are alone; there is no one to be deceived. Come, I speak plainly. I have here a thousand thalers. If you will release her and commend her to my care——"

"Fine care!" she jeered. "You would buy a mistress, would you?"

I put aside her words as if she had not spoken. "I will give you that sum," I said.

"A thousand thalers?" the man muttered, and cupidity shone in his eyes. "You have it? With you?"

I nodded.

"Show it to us," he said, his eyes shining. "Show it to us! Let us see that you have it."

"I have it," I said. And then, noting the glance he shot at the closed door, "but I have pistols also," I added grimly, "and know how to use them. See—here is the money." And I drew from the pocket inside the breast of my coat a packet of notes and laid it on the table beside me. "They are hundred thaler notes—of Frankfort, and there are ten of them. Restore the girl; hand her over to me, and they are yours." And purposely I fluttered the notes before him, separating them with my thumb.

The man, I saw, was tempted. He drew a step nearer, his eyes fixed on the money. "For two thousand," he muttered greedily. "Make it two thousand and I will do it. By G—d I will!"

"I have no more," I said. "It's to take or leave."

He hesitated; I was sure that he hesitated. And though my attention was directed to him, and I was less sure of the woman—whom I took to be the brains of the trio—I fancied that she, too, wavered. Defeat came from an unexpected quarter. The dwarf came between us. He uttered a snarling cry—such a cry as a dog might utter that saw a bone about to be taken from it. "*Nein!*" he growled. "*Nein!* She's my girl! To hell with his money!"

The woman smiled. "See!" she sneered. "You are late for the fair, *mein Herr*."

But I still hoped; I still thought the battle far from lost, and I fluttered the money before their eyes. "A thousand thalers!" I repeated. "It is a fortune, and in your hands, sir"—I looked towards the man, and still held out the money—"it may make more."

But "*Nein! Nein!*" the lad cried passionately, and he rose to his feet, clawing the air with his great misshapen hands, and crouching as if with a little more he would spring upon me. "She's mine! Mine!" His hands opened and closed, as if he had me by the throat.

"That's your answer," the woman said dryly, and she drew a deep breath. "We don't sell"—with that evil smile—"our daughter, *mein Herr*."

"Still," the man muttered doubtfully, "if you've two thousand? For two thousand?"

"I have no more," I said.

"Then—*nein*!" the man answered, shrugging his shoulders—and I saw that his mind, too, was made up. "After all—the lad is right. She is his."

I looked from one to the other and saw—saw that I had indeed failed; and for a moment the impulse to draw upon them and force the girl from them at any risk almost overcame me. Then I saw the hopelessness of the thought and the madness of it, and I put it away. Instead, "Then, listen," I said as I hid the notes away. "It will

be for your own good if you do. I shall have you tracked from this house. I know you, and do what you will you cannot escape me. And if a hair of this girl's head is injured; if there is foul play"—I looked from one to the other—"if lead succeeds where pewter fails—ay, you flinch, but I know more than you think!—if she dies in your hands, no matter in what way, then God have mercy on you, for I will have none! I will have none!" I repeated, "nor those who are behind me. So be warned! Be warned! No!"

For the man, his eyes devilish with rage, had made a movement as if he would get between me and the door. "Stand back!" I cried. "Stand where you are, or I will scatter your brains on that wall. And remember! From this moment I am on your track, and I will never leave it! Use your lead, or whatever devilish contrivance you have, but if the girl be injured your heads shall pay for it as sure as there is a God in Heaven! Be warned! That is my last word! Be warned!"

I went out, almost falling over Grüssbaum as I passed through the doorway, but not heeding him—what if he had listened? I strode through the noisome kitchen and down the passage. If I had failed to release the girl, still I had done what I could, and I could do no more. And the remembrance of their malignant faces as I had seen them at the last, certified me that I had done something—that at the worst they would hesitate before they pursued their evil path to the end. I had done something.

CHAPTER XX

The Haunting Voice

It was noon on the following day when I approached Perleberg, and only those who have known the perplexity of a divided allegiance will be able to divine the painful state of doubt into which the first view of the town plunged me.

For it had been—and were I faithful to my dead friend, it must still be—the goal of all my efforts; the scene to which, in the face of many obstacles and difficulties, I had struggled forward. For here, at Perleberg, poor Perceval had disappeared. Here, beyond reasonable doubt, he had been foully done to death.

And here, could I but wrest them from the obscurity in which they lay buried, were both the secret of his fate and the clue to those papers, so valuable, and fraught with such tremendous mischief, for which he had given his life.

It followed that with Perleberg rising before me out of the dreary plain in which the town stands, I should have had but one desire at heart, to solve that mystery and grasp that clue. With that intent I had come. To that end my thoughts and faculties had been long directed.

And had any one doubted three days before that they would be so directed, had any one then predicted that, arrived on the scene of my labours, I should suffer another aim, another object to share and divert my thoughts, I should certainly and reasonably have laughed at him. As reasonable would it have seemed to me to doubt my identity, or to assert that I should prefer the whim of the moment to every tradition in which I had been reared, and to every rule by which I had hitherto guided my life.

All true. And yet could I—nay, how could I ignore the events of the last forty-eight hours, or wipe from my memory the face that had haunted me for weeks and now rose before me in piteous appeal? How could I steel my heart against the silent prayer of the helpless girl whom I believed to be in direst peril, and snared like any dove in the net of this vile gang—the girl who had no one on earth to look to, no hope of escape if I deserted her?

Perceval—Perceval, poor fellow, cried indeed for vengeance from the dark grave in which he lay. But he was cold and dead—I could not doubt it ; no man could now help him or save him. While she lived she still lived to fear and suffer. And her woebegone face, her quivering lips, her terror-filled eyes haunted me, obsessed me, floated between me and the dull plain, the passing trees, the shimmering water—glided ever, ghost-like, beside the carriage as we drove !

No, it was impossible. I could not be so inhuman, so hard of heart. I could not wrest my thoughts from her. A woman, yet a child, she appealed to all the manhood that was in me, and I could not—I could not close my ears to her.

I had taken Grüssbaum into the carriage with me, and in his aid I discerned the only way out of my trouble. I must depute to him the one task or the other. And perforce and reluctantly I ceded to him that which I held now—I confess it—the nearest to my heart. He knew nothing of Ellis, of his story, or his disappearance.

In dealing with that matter he would be worse than useless. But he could look out for the Waechters, he could search the town for them, he could follow them, attach himself to them, dog them—if need be, threaten them. If they went forward to Hamburg, he could go forward also, and see the girl's father—Altona is but a suburb of Hamburg, though Danish—and put him on the track.

True, I felt that Grüssbaum was but a poor creature to entrust with anything ; I had not much faith in either his perseverance or his courage. But he had shown some flashes of sense, and once or twice he had surprised me by rising to the occasion. In a word, I had no better helper at hand, and I must trust to him or to no one.

Accordingly, as we drove through the outskirts of the town, I laid my instructions upon him ; and again, confound the man, I found him obstructive. This time I was not surprised ; he must act alone, and he had no initiative and no enterprise. But I was determined. I silenced his remonstrances, crushed his weak resistance, and, reminding him brutally of his obligations to me, I bribed him into compliance.

"I entrust this to you," I concluded, "because I cannot do it myself—I have my own work to do in Perleberg. Learn first if these rogues have gone forward. If they have, let me know, you understand, and then do you follow them. I will pay all expenses and make it worth your while besides. But, whatever happens, don't let them escape you. Don't let them give you the slip, man. Hang on to them, or not a thaler will come your way. Not a thaler. That is the bargain. But if you wish to reach your sick wife with a full purse, here, and now, is your chance."

He fingered his chin in pitiable indecision—a weakling indeed, on whom to lean. "If you could tell me, *mein Herr*, why the young lady goes with them?" he prayed. "Why she does not——"

"Leave them?" I exclaimed. "If I could tell you that I should not be sending you after them."

"If they go forward—I am to follow?" he muttered. "But if they do not?"

"Well, if they don't, so much the better!"

He still fingered his chin, but on a sudden he looked at me more sharply than was his wont. "Who are they, honoured sir?" he asked. "Do you know?"

"No, I don't," I said. "I don't know. If I did——"

"Just so, just so," he mumbled. "To be sure. To be sure, honoured sir, I see."

A moment later we drove past the end of a street, and, following the main road some sixty yards farther, we halted before the posthouse. I descended from the carriage and looked about me—looked with growing interest. For, now that I stood on the spot, the Baron's story of Perceval's last hours recurred to me in all its vital detail.

The posthouse was a shabby wooden building with two gables and two doors opening on the road. A gateway, abutting on it, admitted to a yard enclosed by untidy stables. On the farther side of the gateway from the house a low building declared itself the postilions' room—that room which Perceval, in a fever of anxiety ordering and counter-ordering his horses, had repeatedly entered on that fateful night.

There, where my carriage now stood—in the road as is

the German way—his had stood, and to and fro beside it, impatiently awaiting the coming of the French postboy, he had paced up and down in the dusk, until out of the darkness had stepped to his side the shrouded thing that in a moment had erased him from the living! The thing that so far, covered by the veil of night, had defied detection.

Had he been lured a few yards this way or a few yards that? Had he been struck down under the more remote wall of the inn where of a night the gloom would be deep? Or in the shadow of the ramshackle tavern that leaned and tottered on the other side of the road, some twenty yards farther from the foot of the street?

It hung out the sign of the Black Cow, and I knew it for the disreputable inn of which the Baron had spoken; the inn beneath which in a cellar had been found the skeleton which was not Ellis's, but betrayed some earlier crime. Or had he walked away from this place with the life still safe in him, and gone into the town? And perished, God only knew where and how?

The answer was to seek. It was for me to seek.

Meantime, the place lay much as I had pictured it, thanks to the good Baron's accuracy. But, as my eyes travelled from the posthouse to the distant street-end, and round to the Black Cow, and so back to the sordid group of loiterers who hung about the posthouse doors and watched me suspiciously, my hopes sank and I felt all my helplessness.

I perceived more fully the difficulties of my task. I owned, with the *mise en scène* before me, that where others, better equipped, had failed, it was most unlikely that I should succeed. In Berlin fancy had had full play. I had supposed that, were I once on the spot, discoveries would leap to the eye. But the little group of houses, the road, the yard, the everyday life about them, told no tales.

They raised before the imagination the blank wall of the actual. Perceval had passed this way, had entered this house and left this house, had paced this road, had passed from it to his death. But the scene retained no trace of him; it told no more of him or his fate than any group of houses on the Berlin-Hamburg *chaussée*.

He had left no mark—or the life of many commonplace

days had obliterated it; and it was with a baffled sense of disillusion that I at last turned away, and, entering the posthouse by the nearer door, sought the small room in which he had supped, and where the servant-wench had come on him pacing to and fro and talking to himself—and again had seen him examining his pistols.

I ordered dinner, and standing with my back to the stove, I watched the girl—the same buxom girl who had watched Ellis—as she laid it. From time to time she cast a stealthy glance at me—at my fur cloak I fancied, for the room being cold, I had kept it on. And at last: "Is August here?" I asked.

But my question, abrupt as it was, failed to surprise her. "So!" she said, and her face took on a sullen cast; "you are one of them?"

"One of whom?"

"The police. August? No, you know well. He is in gaol."

"Ah, I remember," I said. And I put two or three questions to her; about the two Jews who had supped with Ellis, and as to the latest moment at which she had seen him and where. But all I could extract from her was: "I have told you all I know, and I have been tormented enough. I have been badgered, teased, threatened—till I don't know what I remember and what I don't. I don't know what happened to the gentleman, but"—viciously—"I wish he had never been born; *der gute Gott* knows that!"

No, I was a day, two days, many days late for the fair. It was a case of *la moutarde après dîner*. Whatever traces of the crime there had been, whatever clues might have been gathered, had been over-trodden, confused, destroyed this many a week. And doubtless I should find all the witnesses in the same mood as this girl; weary of questioning, uncertain what they remembered, and what had been suggested to them; above all, sulkily set on not committing themselves to anything.

With a lad in the yard I had my greatest success, little as that was. He had seen and he vaguely remembered the missing postilion, and he confirmed the fact that the man had worn a cast-off French uniform, and had been

dark-complexioned wth very black eyebrows. In his judgment—but the stranger had kept his leather collar turned up and had shown his face little—a French deserter.

But there again, as the fellow had spoken German, the lad was not sure; he might have been a German in French pay. Be that as it might—and this was what chiefly interested me—the lad retained a hazy impression that he had seen the face before; at some time and somewhere, he could not say where. It was all, indeed, misty and uncertain, and, alas, when pressed to search his memory, he only grew more doubtful.

"On the road? Driving through perhaps?" I suggested. But no, he was not sure that it was on the road. He could not tell where it was. Or, in fine, and at last, whether it was; he might not have seen the man before. He might have only fancied it. He had certainly not seen him since.

It needed but an hour of this to plunge me into the deepest dejection. I saw the absurdity of my belief that I, a stranger and a foreigner, could learn anything where the authorities had failed; and before I left the posthouse I had as good as given up hope. It was only as a matter of duty that I proceeded into the town to interview von Kalisch.

The Baron's description had been so clear and the town was so small that I needed no guide. Five minutes saw me standing in the Market Place, over-large for the town, with the hoary cathedral on one hand, some low arcaded houses on the other, and in the middle of the grass-grown cobbled space the grey, age-worn, crumbling statue of Roland.

Beyond this, and facing me, rose the quaint little Rathhaus, of which one end abutted on a street that left the Market Place at a corner, while the other end was divided by a house of some pretensions from the parallel street which left the market place at the other corner. The latter street led, I knew, to the German Coffee House.

A sleepy old-world place, smacking nothing of crime or mystery. Here and there a dog wandered, its nose to the ground. At one or two doors a tradesman in a night-cap loitered, smoking his long German pipe and gazing stolidly before him. About the crumbling statue sparrows

chirped and fluttered and pigeons strutted. The heavy bell of the cathedral tolled the hour of two, and a boy with a satchel on his back issued noisily from a doorway and clattered through the Arcade.

I walked across to the residence which prolonged the Rathhaus, and I knocked at the door. A good-looking, frank-faced girl, with blue eyes and a mass of light hair wound about her head, opened it. She started on seeing me, and I was sure that even before I spoke she associated me with that other traveller in the fur cloak who had come so tragically into her life.

I asked if Captain von Kalisch was at home.

She admitted me, but reluctantly, I thought. And as I passed by her she looked at me covertly. No doubt she, like the others, had heard enough of the matter; had been questioned and bullied and questioned again, until she was weary of it. No doubt she had told all that she knew a hundred times. Oh, it was a hopeless—a hopeless task on which I had embarked.

Still, the girl impressed me favourably. I judged her to be honest and straightforward; one who would tell the truth as far as she knew it. And the Governor, when I was admitted to his modest quarters, had the same effect on me. He wore glasses and a small beard, was smallish himself, and of a more intellectual type than the common run of Prussian officers. But he sighed when he saw me and I told him who I was. He, too, had had more than enough of the case.

"So!" he said. "You want to know? But first sir"—formally—"your authority, if you please."

I gave him Davout's letter and he read it, and sighed again, as he returned it to me. An Englishman vouched for by a Frenchman! Matters had come to a pretty pass in Prussia when these things were! However—"Very good," he said wearily. "What, *mein Herr*, do you wish to know?"

"What you think," I said. "Your opinion."

"Oh!" he answered. "That? Well, I've thought till I am tired. And I see only two alternatives: one which I believe to be the truth, and another remotely possible."

"The first, then, if it please you?"

"A common *guet-apens*. I think your friend was murdered for what he had about him, and buried in some backyard, some house, in the fields, perhaps in the river—God knows where! That is what we all believe here."

"But," I objected, "that was not what he feared when he came to you?"

"No, he feared a plot, the French behind it. True, doubtless. But all the same, what I have said was what happened to him in my opinion."

"A queer coincidence," I said. "He feared—he had cause to fear one thing; and another happened to him!"

"Well, yes. A coincidence."

"But," I argued, "surely in a little place like this, Herr von Kalisch, there are not many *vauriens* capable of such a crime as this."

"There are enough," he said. "The upset of the war—there is hardly a village that has not its disbanded soldiers, broken men, deserters, ready, the worst of them, to cut a throat for a month's pay. And, without a scrap of evidence except that against the man August, what could we do? Lay 'em all by the heels? Impossible, *mein Herr*." He shrugged his shoulders.

"And the other—the remote possibility?"

He glanced at the door. "Well, of course, it may have been the French," he said. "But, if so, without our knowledge. And they must have been very clever if they did it—without our knowledge. Anyway, our hands are clean—I tell you that as man to man. And I don't think the French did it. But I don't deny the possibility. I am quite frank."

I told him of the simultaneous attack that had been made on me, and of the warnings against Klatz that we had received. "They don't fall in with a theory of a chance attack," I argued. "On the other hand, one would have thought, Captain von Kalisch, that if the French were guilty, Davout would not have——"

"Sent you here?" He shrugged his shoulders. "They would not tell him. The order would come from elsewhere."

I thought this over, and in the end: "Well, there's an argument, and I am not sure that it is not a conclusive

argument, against this theory. My friend's papers. If they were in French hands we should be aware of it."

"They would have been published?"

"Or used."

"Then you may depend upon it," briskly, "that my theory is the correct one. The papers were for nothing in it, or they would have been taken and used. Therefore the French were not in it, and he was murdered for what he had. His cloak would have been enough," with his eye on mine.

"The postilion? If anyone is to be suspected it seems to me that he is the man. Have you learned nothing of him?"

"Nothing. He may be hundreds of miles away by now. In Silesia, on the Rhine, in Poland—God knows where. Perhaps in Spain."

That seemed a hopeless view and I felt proportionately discouraged. I asked the Governor to describe in minute detail the events of that afternoon—Ellis's arrival, his application for a guard, his appearance, his words, his manner. He did so, and with an honest desire, I could see, to tell the truth. When he had done—and his story went not a jot beyond the Baron's report—"At first, I confess," he added, "I thought it a case of suicide. Your friend's manner was wild, his statements disjointed; he made a sort of mystery of what he feared, he looked like a man who had not slept for nights, and I was inclined to think his fears a delusion. But, of course when the body could not be found I changed my mind."

"Poor Perceval! Poor Ellis!" I muttered, moved by the picture. And I felt once more the bite of remorse, of self-reproach, which was never entirely to leave me. "Nothing of his has been found? Nothing that was on his person?"

"Nothing except the cloak."

"Which was not his," I rejoined. And I explained that matter. "And now as to the girl who let me in," I said. "She believes, I understand, that my friend returned at nine o'clock and asked for you. I want to look into that—into that especially. Someone, I take it, did come and did ask for you? And according to her

story, she sent him after you to the German Coffee House. What I want to know is—did any one come on to you there? Any stranger?"

"Well, yes"—reluctantly—"a man did ask for me there and see me. A stranger."

I opened my eyes. "Oh," I said. "And did he say that he had come on from your house?"

"No."

"But have you since learned if he did call—at this house. Because if he did, he, and not Ellis, was the caller—at nine o'clock."

But von Kalisch shook his head. "I thought of that, of course. But too late. The man was a Danish merchant, going for Holstein, who sought leave to stay two nights in the town. Unfortunately, when the point arose he was gone, and we have failed to get into touch with him."

"But he may have been the man?"

"He may. He was a tall man like your friend, and he wore a cloak. A blue *roquelaure* with a red lining and a high stiff collar."

"Umph! Well, there again we are in doubt. Can I see the maid?"

"Certainly." He went out and called her in, explaining—but I knew that this was unnecessary—my interest in the matter: "Speak freely, Lotte," he added, for she looked much inclined to cry. "We know your only desire is to tell the truth."

"I only want to know one thing," I said. "Do you believe that the gentleman who called at nine o'clock was the traveller who had taken tea with the Governor earlier in the afternoon?"

She looked at me piteously. "I don't know," she said. "I don't know. He had a cloak like the other, and he was of the same height. And his speech seemed foreign. But there was no light in the passage and the lamp in the Market Place was behind him."

"He went away as if for the German Coffee House?"

"Yes. He turned the corner as if to go down the street."

"And someone joined him?"

"I don't know," she said with the same unhappy expression.

"But you thought that someone joined him? You have said so?" I insisted.

"There was a man near the Roland Statue who seemed to move in the same direction at the same time as the gentleman turned from the door. I fancied that he had been waiting for him, and was about to rejoin him. But I did not see them meet, and"—with a sigh—"it may not have been so."

"You could not see what that man was like?"

"Only that he was rather tall than short. I can say no more."

"At any rate, it was no one you knew?"

"It might have been my brother—I should not have known."

It was evident that she was telling the truth, and I could get no more from her. When I had thanked her and she had retired: "What are you going to do?" the Governor asked.

"Stay here and look about me," I replied. But I spoke despondently. What could I do or what could I learn that had not been done and learned already?

"At the Golden Crown?"

"No, at the German Coffee House. The only clue that we have seems to lead in that direction. If the traveller who called on you at nine o'clock was my friend, then somewhere between here and that inn—he disappeared."

"Very good," he rejoined. "It's a decent house, though plain. I will take you there and see that they make you comfortable."

He took up his hat and cloak and we went out, and turning the corner of the house walked down a narrow street rendered narrower by the horse-blocks and shutter-bars that projected from the houses. It was a quiet old-fashioned street and clean, despite the kennel that ran down the middle. A dozen painted signs swinging on iron-work gave it an antique and almost a gay appearance.

It ended in the Shoe Market, a bourne unworthy of it, for the market was as sordid as the street was respectable. A tiny draggle-tailed square it seemed, shut in

by frowsy houses and not made more sightly by the stalls that encumbered the middle space. However, we did not enter it, for the Coffee-house was the last house in the street, and we turned in there.

"It is an excellent house," von Kalisch explained as we passed in, "if it were not next door to the Shoe Market. A little old-fashioned"—as my eye fell on the washing apparatus, which was just outside the door of the coffee-room—"but clean, you will find."

"Respectable people?"

"Oh, perfectly. They must give you rooms at the front."

That, however, was just what they could not do. The Baron von Graben, his lady and family, had the first floor. Two French officers were over them, and a Bremen merchant and his clerk.

The host—a very fat man—greatly regretted it, but if the Governor's friend would put up with the first floor back for a day or two something would doubtless fall in! Everything should be done to make the illustrious Herr with the hotel satisfaction feel.

The Governor was displeased, and said so—he was a friendly man, but that did not help—and leaving him in the coffee-room I went upstairs to see the rooms. I found that the first floor suite was darkened by the wall of a house, separated from the windows by an alley, scarcely six feet wide; and I decided to go up higher.

For lack of better, I chose a single room on the upper floor, the dormer windows of which overtopped the opposite eaves. Having settled this, and accepted von Kalisch's invitation to sup with him next evening, I bowed him out and went up again to the room I had chosen.

A stout serving-wench was lighting the stove, but fled on my entrance, and, glad to be alone and free to arrange my thoughts, I threw myself on the bed. I had been so continually on the move since I left Zerbst that to feel that I was now established in settled quarters even for a short time was a relief to me. The room, though bare and sparsely furnished, was spotlessly clean, and I felt that for a day or two I could do with it.

I did not mean to sleep; I meant to think; I meant

to weigh what I had heard. But as the room grew warm I drowsed off, my last remembered thought a resolve that in another ten minutes I would descend and set forth on a thorough exploration of the town.

Dinner-time was past, supper-time not yet come, and so no one came near me, and I must have slept nearly three hours, for when I awoke the room was in twilight, though the sky shone clear and cold above the opposite roof.

Ashamed of this waste of time, I sprang to my feet. To learn the hour by my watch I had to go to the window, and there I stood awhile looking out. Six feet away a dormer window, similar to that from which I looked, but a little lower, faced mine. It was closed with shutters of rough unpainted deal, and so did not lessen my privacy.

I paused, gazing at the sky above the gable, until, feeling that the stove had over-heated the room, I opened the window and thrust out my head. The alley below was almost in darkness, but I could see that the crazy-looking building opposite—of which the dormer was a part—appeared to be a brewery or the like, for the wall, blind and bald, was broken half-way down by a doorway surmounted by a hook and pulley. My curiosity satisfied, I drew in my head and I was debating, with my eyes on the window opposite, whether I should shut my window or leave it open, when I experienced the oddest thing.

A voice whispered "Cartwright!" apparently in my ear; whispered my name so clearly and distinctly that I started and turned, assured that someone had entered the room. But the room was empty—empty of all but shadows, and I remembered, moreover, that I had turned the key in the door.

No one, therefore, could have come in. Still, the impression that I had heard my name uttered by someone close to me was so vivid that I stepped to the door, unlocked it, and looked down the passage. The passage was empty. The whole of the upper floor of the house was quiet. I might have heard a mouse move.

I was puzzled. I went back into the room, closed the door, and again looked round the place. I even, though the idea was ridiculous, looked under the bed, which like most German beds was long enough for a lad of fourteen.

Of course, I found no one, and nothing; and smiling at my own fatuity, I went back to the window. I took hold of it to close it, for the room had grown cold, and would certainly be colder when I returned if I left the window open.

"Cartwright!"

This time I whipped round as if a hand had been laid on my shoulder. Not that the voice was loud; it was so low as to be barely audible. But if my name had been shouted aloud, if it had been attended by a trumpet blast, it could not have shaken me more, for the voice was Perceval Ellis's. It certainly sounded like Perceval's.

I felt a tingling in my scalp, and after one hasty glance round, which showed me nothing, I closed the window and stepped back into the middle of the room. Thence, turning about, I looked keenly and intently into every corner.

It was fancy—just fancy—I told myself, but I could not refrain from a shudder. The room was assuredly cold, and perhaps I had caught a chill standing at the window. The bed looked a little odd, too; almost as if someone were lying on it; and while I knew that this was impossible, it was, nevertheless, with an effort that I forced myself to approach it.

Of course, what I had seen on it was no more than my cloak, but as I took it up and hastily threw it about me, I could not refrain from glancing over my shoulder. The room was darker as well as colder than it had been—and what was that odd-looking thing on the floor?

I laughed aloud. This would never do! I crossed the floor and dealt the thing a hearty kick. It was an extra duvet which I had thrown off the bed when I lay down. So much for that! And with another laugh at my own folly I flung the door open and tramped noisily and with something of a swagger down the stairs.

I would not look behind me—I was not a fool to that extent—but all the same I breathed more freely when I reached the hall, and in the street I squared my shoulders and strode along. No doubt I had been thinking so much of poor Perceval and his last troubled hours that—but I was myself again now, and able to smile at my foolishness.

By the time I reached the Market Place it was night.

On one side of the great open space the cathedral lay long and dark, a crouching beast. On the other, a light or two twinkled under the Arcade—mainly in an oilman's window. In the middle a single lamp shed a faint radiance on old Roland.

I stepped into the Governor's doorway and tried to visualise the scene which the maid had described—Ellis, tall and cloaked, approaching me, his face in shadow, behind him the form of the man lurking near the statue, then the two moving, the one behind the other, towards the narrow street up which I had come. I found that I was able to do this—and I did it a little in bravado—without a qualm. No voice spoke in my ear, no unseen presence sought to make itself felt.

Satisfied, and smiling at myself, I crossed the open square at a brisk pace and plunged into the wider street that led to the posthouse. I had not only my baggage to seek, but Grüssbaum and his mission on my mind. He should have learned something by this time, and even if I did not find him awaiting me, I felt certain that I should hear news of him.

But the reception that I met with at the posthouse was discouraging. I suppose that my arrival that morning had taken the people of the house by surprise, and so they had answered my questions, Now they had had time to think, and associating me with the trouble which Ellis's disappearance had brought upon the house—for I believe that there was not one among them who had not been at one time or another under arrest—they looked upon me as an enemy and a person to be kept at arm's length.

The most harmless questions now met only with grunts or sullen answers, and when I asked if the person who had arrived with me was there, or had left a message for me, they denied all knowledge of him. It was only when, baffled by the stupidity of the people in the house, I had pushed my inquiries into the yard, that I learned the dismaying truth—if it was the truth. For at first I doubted.

It was an ostler seated on a bucket cleaning a horse's legs by the light of a horn-lanthorn who informed me. "The man that came with you?" he repeated. "He posted on—at two sharp, he did."

"Posted on?" I exclaimed. "At two? Impossible!"

"Ay, but he did. Smallish man, white-faced, wasn't he? Soft spoken?"

"Yes. That's the man, but——"

"Well, he went for Hamburg—with two horses, at two sharp, as I told you. Seemed in a mortal hurry to be gone, too!"

"Are you sure?" I cried, with a sinking heart.

"Well, I see him go," dryly. "Didn't they tell you in the house?"

"No, they didn't, d—n them!"

"Well, they knew well enough. Well enough they knew," doggedly. "See him go as well as me!"

In a towering rage, and with a very unpleasant suspicion in my mind, I returned to the house. I caught master and maid conferring in the passage, and I fell upon them. "If you don't tell me the truth," I swore, "I'll have the Governor here in ten minutes, and I'll see if he can make you speak!"

That brought Master Postmaster to his senses. He lowered his tone. He remembered now. To be sure, of course he remembered. The gentleman's friend had gone on at two—for Hamburg."

"Then he must have left a message," I stormed. "Or a letter? Out with it, rascal! Or if I have to go to the Governor——"

But the Postmaster, cringing now, asseverated by all his gods that nothing had been left for me—no letter, no message, nothing! The traveller had appeared to be in a great hurry to be gone and had wasted no words on anyone. He had ordered the horses within five minutes of my departure, and had started to the minute at two.

Now I had given Grüssbaum the clearest order that if he found that the Waechters had passed through the town he was not to follow them without informing me. But I had also, that he might not be without money, given him a hundred and fifty thalers in advance. And with this in my mind, and the fact that he had driven off th moment my back was turned, what was I to think? What could I think?

Well, only one thing, and I ground out a savage oath

as I recognized it. The man had duped me. He had taken my money, and the moment he had got it in hand he had absconded, laughing at my folly. Ay, and by now he was a couple of stages on his way to his sick wife—if he had a sick wife, and the whole story which had gained him a free ride and a full purse was not a flam.

I saw it all, and saw, too, what a fool I had been to trust him, with his crafty white face and his secretive ways! Why, his very manner should have warned me! Had it not roused my suspicions a dozen times?

Yet, with all that to reason from, I had handed him a sum large enough to tempt an honest man, and, of course, he had treated me as I deserved to be treated! He had not thought it necessary even to go into the town, or to make a pretence of inquiry, but had made sure of his plunder the moment my back was turned.

"Oh, d—n!" I cried, and on a sudden suspicion I inquired for my valise. Had the rogue taken that, too?

Well, he had not—for a wonder! Perhaps he had feared that I might trace him by it. I gave the order for it to be taken to the Coffee House, and recalling, with a pang—a pang of remorse and pity—that my plan for keeping the Waechters in view was now at an end, I inquired, but with little hope, if they had passed through.

So far as I could learn they had not; no party resembling theirs had come or gone. But I felt that I could now trust no one; even my one honest informant, the ostler, might have been bribed. And it was with a painful sense of defeat that I left the yard and slowly and heavily made my way back into the town.

The honours were with them! The wretches had won, and might laugh at me and my abortive threats. And the girl? Whatever her fate, and I shuddered to dwell on it, she would think that I had abandoned her.

In the depths of her misery, in her despair and fear, she would know that I had failed her; and ignorant of that other quest that weighed so heavily on me, she would believe that I had done so in sheer wantonness, caring nothing! The thought was torture to me!

I wandered, seeing little, across the dark Market Place and along the street which left it at the corner of the

Rathhaus. I cast a cold eye at the other inn, the Golden Crown, and turning at right angles when I came to the end of the street, I made my way back to my inn through a narrow and not over-clean lane that came out in the Shoe Market at the Coffee House corner.

Near the end of the lane I passed the brewery—if brewery it was, for it seemed to be unoccupied—as well as the mouth of the alley on which my window looked.

I glanced at the one and into the other, but idly and without interest. I had not valued Grüssbaum's company, much less had it occurred to me that I leant on him. But his desertion, and the manner of it, left with me an extraordinary feeling of loneliness.

I had come to Perleberg to succeed, were it possible, where others had failed ; to read a riddle that had defied experience and baffled old hands. And never had I felt myself so unfit, so inefficient, so unequal to the task as at this moment.

I carried my mind back to the time when I had left London for Vienna, confident in myself and proud of my mission ; when, holding myself on a par with Gentz and Haugwitz and their like, I had fondly looked forward to crossing swords with them ; when, gaily, with all the threads in my hands, I had sneered at the old school of diplomats, and thought nothing above my powers.

Ay, and thence I carried my mind forward to the moment when Perceval's arrival had dashed the cup from my lips and I had sworn that but for this I had in another week or another month scored such a success as would have saved Austria and changed the face of Europe.

Vain imaginings, but never had they seemed as vain as now, when I felt that the smallest, the youngest of third-class clerks might smile at me. A diplomat ? Why, I had not the wits of a mouse. A reader of men ? Why, a common cheat of the road had fleeced me ! A pair of vulgar intriguers had baffled me ! I had sunk from the Ball Platz to the common police-office, from Vienna to Perleberg—and Perleberg gave me a fool's mate. Ah, I muttered, how ready men are to plume themselves when for a moment fortune has smiled on them !

CHAPTER XXI

The Dwarf Again

My heart was not quite so low next morning, but it was with little courage and less hope, and simply as a matter of duty, that I turned to my inquiry. I had come to the conclusion that the police had focused their attention on the posthouse and the Black Cow.

They had ransacked the adjoining buildings, they had dug up the gardens, they had searched the stream, they had turned every stone and arrested every person in both houses on whom suspicion could lie. And in doing this they had rendered sullen or mute all those whom they had not arrested. To look for further evidence in that quarter seemed now to be hopeless.

But either because they had not believed the story of the nine o'clock call, or because the respectability of the German Coffee House had discouraged them, they did not appear to have followed the trail into the town with the same vigour. Here, therefore, I judged that I must make my discoveries, if I was destined to make any.

Had Ellis really gone to the Coffee House that night? Had he been seen in it? Had he been seen by anyone in the street leading to it? These were the questions to which I wanted answers, and my first attack was made on my landlord; the fat, beaming tun of a man who had received me.

I got him up into my room, and was surprised as well as pleased when I found him as willing to talk as I was to listen. Suspicion had not touched him, and I soon saw that he was one of those who savour a mystery. But when it came to what he knew himself, he could tell me nothing. The nobility ball had filled his house on that fatal evening, there had been many strangers, and much coming and going, much confusion, to which the noise of a band had contributed.

He had questioned all his servants long ago, and traced the man who had admitted the Holstein merchant to

see the Governor. But no one could be found who retained any memory of a second foreigner. In fine, the man could not carry the trail a yard farther. At the corner of the Market Place, at the moment when the two dark figures melted into the twilight, it stopped.

We finished our talk on the landing outside my door, and as I turned to re-enter, after dismissing my host, I caught the eye of a chambermaid who was scrubbing the floor. "Was it about the nobility ball the gentleman was asking?" she said, looking up from her work. "Well, there was an odd thing happened next morning—in his room, too, if he would like to hear it."

I encouraged her. "Come in and tell me," I said. "What was that?"

"Well, *mein Herr*, it was not much," she said. "Still, it was odd. A gracious, good-to-the-eye-seeming young lady had this room, and an older lady who was with her had the next. Well, when they were leaving—that was early in the morning after the ball, or, indeed, late in the morning, for most of us had been up all night——"

"Had they been to the ball?" I interposed. "The two ladies?"

"Oh, no, they were just travellers like *mein Herr*, who had come in late the evening before. Well, when they were leaving the Frau had lost something—an ear-drop that was not in all the world to be matched, to listen to her—and lost it in th räulein's room, she thought.

"Such a rumpus as there was then! Nothing would do but every corner must be searched, and all the young lady's baggage that had been strapped must be opened and even the flounces of the frock the Fräulein was wearing must be tried, lest it be caught in them, and what not and what not! There was no end to it, seeking and searching!"

"Did she suppose, then," I asked, "that the young lady had——"

"Had taken it? Not according to her," the chambermaid smiled. "Oh, no, the Frau, to begin, was all milk and sugar—if she might search! But it wasn't hard to see what she thought."

"And the young lady?"

"Scared out of her wits, I promise you, *mein Herr*. And seeing her all of a tremble and the colour of a bleached napkin, I said I'd call up my mistress; and at that my lady that had been getting sharper and sharper, lowered her tone, I can tell you! And they went downstairs, and I thought them gone. But in a moment up comes my lady again, and gives me a whole thaler, and to it again, looking behind the drawers and turning over the bed and raking out the ashes in the stove, and even feeling the quilt.

"If a flea to be found there was, she'd have had it! But nothing came of it; at any rate, I saw her find nothing. And when she gave it up and went down her face was black as thunder, and I was glad to think that the young lady was going no farther with her."

"They parted here then?"

"Yes, *mein Herr*. They had shared a *landschute*, I heard, but I fancy that the young lady did not like her company. She was going to Altona to see her sick father —so she told me."

"What?" I cried. I sprang to my feet. Hitherto I had been listening but idly. "Say that again."

Surprised by my manner, the woman repeated the statement. "Why?" she added. "Did the Herr know her?"

"I've met her," I said. "Had the elder woman—who searched—a small dog with her?"

"So! To be sure she had. Your honour is right. A dog with bells."

And then for the first time I saw a little light falling into a dark place. It broke on me that it was on the strength of some false charge such as this, some hold such as the story suggested, that the woman had taken possession of the lonely terrified girl, and had enslaved her body and soul. By heaven, it looked like it! It looked like it! "And she seemed to be frightened, did she?" I continued eagerly; "the young Fräulein?"

"That morning? I believe you," the wench replied. "Frightened in the highest degree, she was, and her face like paper, though she'd come in the evening before as easy as you please. But with the other it was pretty

much a word and a blow! For her, I'd judge her "—with a scornful toss of the head—" to be like the eardrop she said she had lost—for she showed me the fellow to it—more gaudy than good."

" But did not the young lady defend herself? "

" No, she was that terrified that she just sat with her hands before her and looked as if she was going to swoon. Not a bit of spirit in her! If it had been me—but then, you see, the other did not right down accuse her. She was too clever for that. And for my part I never believed the young lady took a pin. Her only fault was that she was too good for her company. Oh, I know. Do you imagine "—with a toss of her head—" that I've made beds for the gentry for seven years and don't know black from white? "

Someone called her then, and she went out, and you may be sure that she left me to thoughts that in a trice carried me back to a day before all these troubles had fallen upon me; to the day of that ever-to-be-regretted departure from Wittenberg, when, stepping out into the early freshness of the August morning, I had seen a *landschute* standing before the inn, and in it these two women.

Well might I call that morning, which had opened so brightly, unfortunate, for it had led poor Perceval to his death, to me it had brought lasting remorse, and to this girl, who seemed to have nothing in common with us, God only knew what pain and humiliation.

But was I right? The woman and the girl had parted here, according to the chambermaid; and the girl I knew, from what I had learned at Zerbst, had gone on to Altona, had stayed there many weeks, had nursed her father back to health, had started on her return journey. Her arrival had been expected on the day before my own flight from Zerbst.

Here, then, was a long interval, and the question pressed on me—how had the young lady and Frau Waechter come again into contact? Why, after parting in these circumstances, had they come together again? The Fräulein was gentle, timid, easily swayed, perhaps;

but she was not unversed in the world ; she had mixed in society, she had enjoyed at Zerbst a privileged position.

What had induced her, then—what, I asked myself, could have induced her—to let this woman, violent, vulgar, common, an adventuress, take possession of her anew, browbeat, terrify, annex her ?

What, indeed ? There lay the riddle, and a riddle for me without an answer. And in my mind it gave rise to another. A thousand thalers was, in a poverty-stricken Germany, a large sum. It was for small people—for people living by their wits—a fortune. Why, then, had the Waechters refused such a bribe ? A big bribe ? Why had it failed to persuade them to release their hold over the girl ?

That seemed more remarkable the longer I dwelt on it. The man had been tempted. He had wavered. But the woman had seen farther. She had valued their possession of the girl at more than a thousand thalers. Why ? On what basis, I asked myself.

I feared to think. And, alas, of what use was thought —at this time of day ? They were gone ! Gone beyond seeking, gone, through Grüssbaum's treachery, beyond help ! I could only—and it was a poor alternative—resolve to tell the Governor the whole story when I supped with him that evening.

He had the air of a humane man and he might be able to do something, though the odds were that the party were by this time across the Danish border.

All day I had this and the poor girl's fate at the back of my mind, while apparently I was busied *de coeur et d'âme* in the other matter. In the hope of alighting on some one able to testify to Ellis's passage through the street, I devoted the morning and a part of the afternoon to visiting every house between the Market Place and the German Coffee House. The landlord of the latter offered to accompany me, and I could not have done my work under more favourable auspices.

Mouths that the presence of the Governor or the police would have closed were opened in the sunshine of his vast and beaming countenance ; neighbour passed me on to neighbour ; householders interrogated their children ;

in every dwelling the story was told and canvassed; even the fact that it was market-day and the town pretty full, was not allowed to stand in my way.

But little came of it, and nothing that was definite. Strangers had been seen that evening, alone or in company; I had plenty of evidence of that. But then it was the night of the nobility ball, and the presence of strangers was to be expected. Whether, of these strangers, Ellis had been one, no one could say.

By half-past two I was as well known up and down the quaint, quiet street as my host himself. Smiles met me on every side. I was a centre of interest; I was exhibited to country people. And for my part there was hardly a house-block and hardly a sign—from the huge pair of spectacles that bridged the way before the watchmaker's to the gigantic coffee-pot that hung before Speiser, the grocer's—with which I was not familiar.

The children ran to me with messages, the dogs thrust their noses into my hand, even the sun shone with a warmth beyond that of November. As I looked up and down the narrow vista, I could not believe that Ellis had come to harm either here or hereabouts. Tragedy seemed so far—so very far off. I could not associate this gay, friendly, smiling street with it.

It was hard upon three when we gave up the inquiry, and I do not know which was the more disappointed—my good host or I. "But it is this way, *mein Herr*," he said. "Take to-day. It is market-day. Many people come into my house. Do you think you could get evidence of them all? No! And that reminds me—you had your cloak on when we started?"

"I left it in the hall after dinner," I explained. "I found it too hot."

"Now, there! And suppose someone took it from the hall—do you think we could bring it home to him? Doubtful, very doubtful. Let us hope, therefore, it is safe. A thing as valuable as that!" He shook his head reproachfully over it. "It should not have been left, *mein Herr*."

However, we found it safe enough, hanging where I had left it, and on this point we had no need of evidence.

But I could quite understand that had any one taken it, he could have done so unperceived in the market crowd ; and I took care to put on the cloak when I went out towards evening.

I thought that I would make some inquiries in the other street, in which the Golden Crown stood, and for more than an hour I strolled about, now questioning stolid tradesmen at their doors, now surveying from all points the grass-grown market-place which, even on this, the market-day, looked all too large.

Standing first in one place and then in another, I tried to call up the scene ; tried to imagine how, and by what lane or alley, Perceval might, on that ill-fated night, have been lured out of the better parts of the town.

But again the peace and quietness about me were too much for me. Though the Governor had shaken his head and said that there were *vauriens* enough in Perleberg, I could find no room in this dull German town for so stark and grisly a thing as murder.

" It must have been the French, after all," I concluded at last. " With everything to the contrary it still must have been the French who did it." And I stood staring at the great dark couchant lion of a cathedral that flanked the Market Place and was the only object in the town that even approached it in size. Old, very old, I judged ; almost as old as the crumbling statue of Roland that I had the curiosity to approach and touch.

I killed a few moments in that way, and then, dusk coming on, " I'm simply wasting my time," I muttered despondently. " I'm doing no good here ! Not a bit ! "

But beyond what I had done, what could I do ? That was the question, and it meant, what should I do—next day ? I was debating it with my hand still resting on the Rolands-Säule, when a little girl, leaping over the shafts of a cart—one of a long line, laden and unladen, standing in the Place—ran up to me, thrust a scrap of paper into my hand, and with a merry laugh dived under the next cart and was gone !

Had I been prepared for her, I could hardly have detained her, and, as it was, I was left at gaze, staring at the paper that she had placed in my hand. It was a mere

scrap, of coarse make, twisted into the form of a *chapeau à cornes*, but without address. Though night was beginning to darken the narrow streets, there was still light enough in the middle of the open Place to enable me to read, and the roughly scrawled message was short.

"If you still wish"—it ran—"to make the bargain you offered two days ago, follow the man in the brown cloak, who is standing at the corner of the Rathhaus. Do not communicate with anyone, or the deal is off. You are watched."

"So!" I exclaimed. "So! They have thought better of it then!" And I slapped my hand on the cold stone beside me, though the action was but a poor token of the relief—relief amounting to triumph—that I felt. For all day I had had the girl on my mind. All day, going out and coming in, visiting one house after another, I had been haunted by her woebegone face, her sad eyes. And now—now I could save her! The bribe had worked, the offer was to be accepted; the thalers had done their duty after all.

With the note in my hand I looked across the open space in search of the brown man. I could not distinguish him, but the distance was considerable, and below the Rathhaus, in the jaws of the narrow street that flanked it, the dusk was thick. An early light twinkled at the barber's, the oil-shop was lighting up, but as I passed from the open I seemed to pass in a moment from the clear sky of evening to the dusk of night.

I don't know whether it was this change, or the sight of the muffled figure awaiting me at the corner, that made me drop a hand into the pocket of my cloak, to make sure that I had my pistols with me.

They were there safe enough, and reassured by the feel of their roughened handles, I followed the short ungainly figure that at my nearer approach detached itself from the Rathhaus and, without look or sign, moved sluggishly down the street. Disguised as my guide was, in a cloak and flapped hat, I had little doubt that he was Karl, the half-witted lad.

I detested the dwarf, for I found something unnatural in him, in his brutishness and his animal nature; and for a moment it crossed my mind to raise an alarm and

seize him. But to do it might expose the girl to instant vengeance, and, after all, I had nothing to fear; I had my pistols. If treachery were intended, I had little doubt that so armed I could deal with it.

Slouching through the dusk about ten paces before me, the lad passed the Golden Crown, keeping, I noticed, on the farther side of the way and as far as possible from the lamp which a servant was suspending at the door.

Presently he reached the end of the street, and I was not one whit surprised when he turned into the lane that I had followed the evening before—the lane that led, I knew, to the Shoe Market. I do not know in the least why I expected this, but it seemed to me as if I had anticipated it from the beginning.

There were few passers here—the byway was dark, solitary, winding, a place of dead walls and blind houses—and had I not been armed I would not have followed the dwarf a yard. Even as it was, I moved warily; took the outer side of every curve, gave dark corners a wide berth, and where, as happened in one or two places, trees hung over the walls, I kept a sharp look-out.

I was not sorry when, from the bottom of this black trough, I caught sight of a star or two shining serenely in the evening sky—stars that, I daresay, were not yet visible in the open.

I had made up my mind—again I do not know why—that we were bound for the deserted brewery, and so it turned out. My guide stopped at a low door in the wall of the building and drew a key from his pocket.

In this narrow slit at the bottom of which we stood it was too dark, though the lights of the Shoe Market were hardly twenty paces from us, to see what the door was like, but I pictured it mouldering, begrimed, and cobwebbed—the door of a long unused building. However, the key turned silently enough and the door opened.

I hesitated—at the last moment, I own, I hesitated before I entered. Then I asked myself why I had come if I was not prepared to go through with the matter, and ashamed to betray fear, I stepped across the threshold. As I did so: "You are to see the Fräulein first," the lad grumbled. Then: "Wait till I get a light."

I was only too ready to do so, for the passage in which I found myself was dark as the pit, and the sound made by the dwarf locking the door behind us did not tend to hearten me. I pressed my back against the wall and waited, a hand on a pistol, all my senses on guard. However, my caution was uncalled for.

The lad blundered by me and opened a second door, which disclosed a lighted lanthorn standing forlornly on the bottom step of a worm-eaten staircase ; a narrow staircase which showed here and there grains of rye and barley trodden into the cracks between the shrunken boards. It turned on itself, and was such a stairway as we see in English stables leading from saddle room to loft.

The dwarf took up the lanthorn and signed to me to ascend. But I did not like the look of things. If fair play was intended, why such a rendezvous as this ? I declined to run risks, and dryly I bade him go first. He shrugged his shoulders, but taking the lead began to climb, and I followed, and having twice turned round the newel, we emerged on the first-floor.

Here I had an impression of a vast bare chamber more like the empty hold of a big ship than anything else, stretching to infinity and broken only by rows of thick props. Our light was here but as a taper in a church, held by one who peered in from the porch ; and all of particularity that I carried away, in addition to the size and the emptiness of the chamber, was the fact that a gap yawned in the floor about midway across it. I guessed that this was a hatchway used, no doubt, for lowering grain when the building was tenanted.

I saw no more before the lad climbed on, and I followed ; but the higher we mounted and the farther we penetrated into the bowels of this gloomy building, the more suspicious I grew, and the more closely I gripped my weapons. Indeed, I would gladly have stood—or gone back.

But having come so far, I had not the courage to withdraw—nor, indeed, the heart when I thought of the girl ! And two more turns round the newel post, which generations of hands had so rubbed that it shone like marble in the lanthorn-light, brought us to the second floor.

"This way," growled the lad, "and look to your feet, *mein Herr*," and without a glance at me he plunged away across the loose heaving floor, the lanthorn swaying in his hand and now casting its light on the dusty boards that leapt under our tread, now revealing the beams and struts of the vast wagon-roof that sloped above us.

Half-heartedly I trailed behind him, and soon discerned that he was making for a corner whence there jutted out a room, counting-house, or what not, that at some time or other had been boarded off from the great chamber.

Holding his lanthorn up to the crazy-looking door, he turned the key in the lock. The door appeared to stick a little, but he dragged it open and stood aside. "She's here," he growled. "Mind your head. In the inner place."

My eyes, peering in, passed through a second, an open doorway at some paces in front of me, and on a lower level. Framed in this doorway I saw a small bare table, on the table a tallow-candle standing in the neck of a bottle, and in the circle of light which this cast—the girl! Nay, not the girl, but a small, dishevelled head cast forward, the face invisible and buried in the arms that lay outstretched on the table.

So much I saw, made visible by the feeble light of the candle and framed in darkness—so much, and I stepped eagerly forward, caution, Karl, the loneliness of the place all forgotten. I stepped, or rather I plunged, forward, for the two steps that should have descended to the lower floor were not there, and it was much that in my fall I did not break my leg.

As I staggered, striving with a cry of pain to keep my feet, I heard a hoot of triumph. The door was slammed to the post with a force that shook the wooden partition, and behind me I heard the key grate in the lock.

CHAPTER XXII

The Truth at Last

The moment that I recovered from the shock of my abrupt descent, I turned about and a spate of rage flung me like a leaf against the closed door. I beat on it with my hands; I shouted threats and curses. I was not sure that the half-witted lout had hastened my descent by thrusting the door against me, but that was my impression, and it added hugely to my passion.

I felt no fear, for I was well armed; but in my anger at the trick played upon me I thought only of vengeance, and forgot for a space not only the girl's presence and the scene that I had viewed through the open door, but all except that this misshapen oaf had dared to trick and strike me!

"Open the door!" I stormed. "Open the door, do you hear? Or I will shoot the lock off!"

The only answer was a crow of triumph, that, more than once repeated, grew fainter in the distance. I heard the lad's clumsy feet execute a dance on the hollow boards as he retreated across the floor.

"Come back!" I cried in a frenzy of anger. "Do you hear? Come back! Or I will——"

But on that word even the sound of footsteps died away. The dwarf had reached the stairs. And then—I suppose that all this had taken but half a minute, though it seemed to me an age—then at last, panting with anger and my exertions, I desisted, and turned myself about.

And, facing now as I had faced when I entered, I became again aware of the open doorway and the inner room—of the room and the table and the candle burning starkly in the bottle-neck—and the girl! Only there was now this change in the group.

The girl had risen; with her hands resting on the table she was leaning towards me, not, as it seemed to me, in hope or expectation, or even in wonder, but motionless, silent, staring, as if nothing had any longer the power to surprise or appal her.

She did not, she told me afterwards, recognize me at once. The candle was between us ; I stood beyond the scope of its rays in the gloom of the outer room. And though I discerned no sign of it at the time, later she confessed that my sudden entrance and fierce outburst did make more instant and poignant that fear of death which tormented her every hour, and almost her every breath.

But if she did not know me, I knew her, and in a trice the whole colour of my mind was altered. Anger died in me and passion, and in place of them I felt not so much pity—strange to say—as an immense, a burning curiosity. She was here—she was here at last, and in my power, this mysterious, fugitive, evanescent girl, whom I had traced, whom I had followed, who had so long and so completely filled my thoughts !

She was here ; I held her ! And the time would come no doubt when I should pity her. But first—first I must hear her story, I must understand ! I must learn, above all things, the answer to that riddle, that enigma which had so long and so entirely baffled me.

I went forward into the light, and as this fell upon me I saw recognition leap into her eyes, but with it not the thankfulness, not the relief that I anticipated. On the contrary, the girl raised her hands and beat them helplessly on the table. As she did so she sank into her seat, and " You, too ! They have taken you, too ! " she cried, with a gesture of despair.

" No ! " I answered, anxious only, and as quickly as possible to reassure her, for I saw at once how terribly overwrought she was. " No ! They have not taken me ! Have no fear, Fräulein ! I am here to rescue you. I am here to remove you."

" But how ? " she whispered. " How ? How do you come here ? " She stared at me as at a spectre.

" The lad brought me."

" To—to see me ? "

" Yes, to see you. They have offered to release you, Fräulein—for a bribe ! I have brought them what is necessary, and in a minute or two they will be here to meet me and complete the matter. And you will be free."

I looked to see her face brighten at last and relief leap into her eyes. But no, she only glanced fearfully over her shoulder. "No!" she whispered, and a shudder shook her from head to foot. "They will never let me go! Never! Never! Nor you, sir, when we have talked together. They dare not. They cannot. They will take your money, but they will not let us go. They will never let us go. I know"—lowering her voice and with another swift look behind her—"I know too much! Too much for them ever to let me go. They will never let me go—alive!"

And so tragic was her tone, so real her terror, that I caught something of it and for a moment felt my heart sink. What if she were right? What if—but again curiosity won the upper hand, and with one sentence I aimed for the heart of the mystery. "You are Fräulein Mackay?" I cried. "Of the Grand Duke's household at Zerbst?"

She looked at me with eyes too large for her wan face. "I was," she muttered, plucking at the fringe of her bodice "I was!" And I noticed that she would not, or dared not, speak above a whisper, while her eyes, very homes of fear, never ceased to rove the room.

"I was," she repeated shuddering, "in another life. What I am now, God knows. God knows. And even that"—an ugly spasm distorting her features—"I shall not be long! Oh, not long! Not many hours! To-night—to-night may end it. Or"—plucking again at her bodice—"to-morrow night! To-morrow night!"

Never, never had I imagined terror so poignant as that which I read at that moment in her face—a terror that for a time robbed that face of all beauty. She was indeed, and apart from this, a piteous sight. Her hair, which when I had first seen her had been piled in graceful waving curls on the crown of her head, hung down her neck in draggled wisps, dusky and dull.

Her dress, travel-stained and torn in places, sat on her awry and neglected, while dark shadows—under eyes that did not seem to have known sleep for a week—marred her features and rendered them almost ugly. I could see that if I had indeed come in time to save her, I had come

but just in time; another night, another day, and her mind, if not her body, must have failed.

But why? Why? More insistently than ever the question pressed upon my mind. Why? What was the hold, the deadly hold that these wretches had gained upon the girl?

However, the first thing, the urgent thing was to reassure her, and—"Neither to-night, nor to-morrow night," I said stoutly, "will any harm come to you, Fräulein, now that I am with you. Take courage! Understand, be sure, that you are saved. You are no longer alone; no longer unprotected. I am here, and be sure I shall not leave you until you are in safety. Yet first—first let me know my ground. Try, Fräulein, to tell me why you are here; why you are with these wretches. These Waechters?"

"Tell you?" she whispered. "If I tell you"—again her eyes flitted round the room with a movement that I am sure had become habitual—"I doom you, too. You, too! To know what I know—is to die! To die!"

"But all that is past—past and over," I urged earnestly, for I really feared for her mind. "We are together, the Waechters themselves have brought us together. And whether you tell me or no, they will assume that you have told me. Besides, when they come, it will be only to release you. Willing or unwilling, they will be forced to do so. I am not defenceless; I am more than a match for them. See, I am armed. I am well armed. I am surely a match for them. You have nothing to fear now! Nothing!"

But cheerfully, confidently as I spoke, no spark of hope awoke in her eyes. She shook her head. "They are too cunning," she muttered. "Oh, too cunning—too cunning! They have the cunning of the devil! They are listening to us now."

Fear, it is often said, is infectious, and I am free to own that for a moment her words and the tone in which she uttered them shook me. And then I knew so little of the place; there were so many shadowy corners, the light of the miserable candle spread to so short a distance,

the darkness of the empty, far-stretching chamber outside so weighed on the mind!

But for her sake I maintained my air of confidence. I continued to urge her and reassure her; and seeing presently that there was food on the table, and beside it a cup of milk, I induced her to swallow something, though every mouthful seemed to choke her. And by and by, though the colour did not return to her face, nor hope to her eyes, she began to draw some courage from my words and my presence.

And, continually urged to explain, she began at last, but with painful effort, to tell her story; though not until I had again and again at her prayer tried the door, and had made as sure as I could by listening that there was no one within hearing.

Even so, she could not, or would not, speak above a whisper, so that it was a strange and an eerie experience—one of the strangest of my life—to listen, in the silence of that vast building and by the light of that solitary candle, to the hissing whisper that poured into my ear her amazing story. Twice she was forced to pause, overcome by her feelings, and twice she had to drink before she could go on.

Once, too, half way through the tale, she rose with starting, terrified eyes and pointed to the door; but I persuaded her, though my own flesh was creeping, that the alarm was baseless. And so, three-quarters of an hour after she had begun to speak, in a silence that might be felt, she whispered the last syllable in my ear.

"It was at Wittenberg it began to close about me," thus with a shudder she opened, her eyes on the door, her hand clutching my wrist. "I halted a night there—I was on my way to my sick father at Altona. I wanted a partner to share the expense of a *landschute*, and Fate gave me—God knows in what a dark hour—that woman. I did not like her. I saw that she was not of the—the kind that I had been used to.

"But she made herself civil to me; she seemed for some reason to value my company. And when we reached Berlin, and should have parted, she proposed that we should go on together, after resting a day. It suited my

purse. A companion whom I had expected failed to appear, and—and in a miserable hour I consented and went on with her.

"And she still flattered me, but—but things began to go wrong. As far as Berlin we had travelled quickly, easily; now we lingered. Little things, accidents, delayed us, and presently I began to—to fancy that she was on the look-out for someone who—who was travelling behind us, you understand. She was always looking back—looking out—and once I hinted at this. Then her temper flashed out; she was rude and terrified me, and if I had been wise I should have parted from her then.

"Ah, God, that I had! That I had! But she smoothed it over, she fawned on me, and though I now distrusted her, I thought it foolish to quarrel with her when we had so short a distance to go. I know now; she has told me with scorn that she used me for a mask, that up to that point all she had in her mind was the value of a—of a respectable companion, of one whose presence might cover her manœuvres and render her less notable where she stayed.

"But we travelled so slowly that when we should have arrived at Perleberg we were only at Kyritz, where the inn was crowded with people, many of them rough and noisy. We had to eat among them in the common room, and I was not comfortable. But my companion—little, ah, little did I know what it meant at the time—contrived to get seats for us at a small table with two travellers—of the better sort.

"One was tall and foreign-looking, and seemed to be ill, for he supped in his cloak, which was enough to mark him out from those about us. However, he proved only a misery to me, for the woman put herself forward to gain his notice, and I felt this the more as he gave her back only short answers; still, this lasted but a short time, for before the meal was over, upset by something which arose between him and his companion—some note that was delivered to him—he left the table.

"I saw him at the door next morning—he left a little before us; and, ah, God! I was to see him but once more, yet never, never, shall I forget him, never will his face be wiped from my memory."

She paused in irrepressible agitation, but presently she resumed. "We arrived at this place, Perleberg, an hour before sunset. I should have gone to the Golden Crown—I had been recommended to it—but the woman overbore me. She insisted on going to the—the German Coffee House I think it was called, and I was hardly across the threshold before I regretted my weakness. For here, again, the house was crowded; there was a ball going on."

I nodded. "Yes," I said, my heart beginning to beat more quickly. "I know." I began dimly to foresee things.

"Yes"—dully—"a ball and a band playing, so that the house was full of noise and the passages of dancers, and of all manner of people, servants and townsfolk. It was with difficulty that they found us two rooms on the second floor, and I was glad to take refuge in mine, for I was frightened by the confusion.

"My companion said that she had friends to see, and I was glad of it. Relieved by her absence, I asked the chambermaid to bring me supper in my room, and when I had eaten I locked my door—it was not yet nine—and I went to bed.

"I was tired, and I fancied that I had but to lie down to sleep. But it was not so. The strains of the band came up to my room and pulsed in my head, the evening was hot, and, after tossing and turning for a time, I rose in despair and groped my way to the window. I drew aside the curtain and opened the casement.

"The night air soothed me and—God knows what miserable fate was upon me—I remained for a time at the window, now looking at the stars, which were beginning to shine, and now at the gable of a building which faced me. How long I stood there I do not know, but presently a light shone out of a sudden, outlining a window in the gable, and through it I saw a man with a lanthorn in his hand and his back towards me, closing the door of the room.

"I watched the man; he seemed to be striving to secure the door, but almost at once he gave up the attempt, came quickly to the window, and dashed it open. He

looked down; then, as if something alarmed him, he glanced back into the room. I heard him utter an exclamation; again he looked below, then, raising his eyes, he saw me—no doubt the light he held fell on me. In a moment he thrust his hand into his breast, drew something from it, and flung it through my window.

"'Take it—Danish Embassy—Berlin!' he cried. 'You will be rewarded.'

"The thing fell on the floor behind me, and at another time I do not know what I should have said or done. But that happened the next moment which"—she paused, struggling vainly with her emotion—"which I would to God, which I would give the world to forget, which comes back to me in my dreams. The door of the room opposite was burst open, two men rushed in upon the man, I saw him draw a pistol—but too late! The men flung themselves upon him, I saw an uplifted hand, a knife; I saw the blood spurt from his breast!

"I saw him stagger back, his arms raised—stagger out of sight! Then I shrieked! I shrieked again and again, and I turned and tried blindly to reach the door—I tried to give the alarm. But the band below was playing, the room shook with the dancing, my cries were unheard. And before I reached the door I tripped over something, and I fell and swooned. Oh, poor creature that I was," she cried, wringing her hands, "for that was my only chance!"

Sobs shook her, choked her, and for a time she could not continue. Nor at the moment did I urge her to continue. My own thoughts lay too heavy on me—my own horror. At last: "He wore a cloak?" I said, hoarsely. "A fur cloak, didn't he? The man whom they murdered? He was the same whom you had seen—at Kyritz?"

She nodded, still unable to speak. But by and by, regaining some control of herself, and the worst told: "Yes, at Kyritz," she whispered. "Yes, I think so. I am sure of it. But at the time I could think of nothing—nothing but—but the blood! The blood! Oh"—covering her face and trembling convulsively—"it was horrible! Horrible!

In pity I let her be, and in truth I was so shaken myself

that I could not speak. That the man whose murder she had witnessed was Perceval—Perceval, my friend—I could not doubt; nor that in this very building, under this very roof—the ill-omened roof under which we sat—he had been thus foully, thus miserably done to death. But mingled with the horror that I felt was another feeling scarcely less strong, and that was wonder—the wonder to which the great coincidences of life give rise.

For I knew that pity had deflected me from the straight course of my duty. Pity had led me away from the scent I should have pursued and that I had set myself to follow. And, lo! the divergence had but guided me under Providence and by a shorter route to the end of the chase.

"Did you see the men's faces?" I asked as soon as she had a little recovered herself.

She shook her head.

It rose to my mind to ask her the fate of the despatches, for I had not a doubt that the parcel which poor Ellis, faithful to the last, had flung through her window, contained them. But I refrained. For the despatches seemed at this moment a small thing, a mere detail in happenings so tragic. I left her to tell the story, and by and by, in a lower whisper and with many pauses, she went on:

"The fall stunned me. When I came to myself I was on the floor, chilled to the bone, and the first light was stealing into the room. I raised myself and drank some water and crept back to bed, and for a few moments I fancied that the whole was a nightmare, and that I had fallen out of bed in the effort to escape from my dream.

"But I could not sleep, and when it grew lighter my eyes fell on a packet lying on the floor, and I was seized with sickness, for I knew then that it was no dream! And I might—I ought to have roused the house even then and told the story. But the thing had so terrified me, I had become such a coward, that I fancied that the men who had done it were at my elbow—were watching me. I feared even to open the door, and especially I shrank from keeping the packet—in sight or about me.

"I looked round for a hiding-place, and at length—I do not know what made me think of it—I went to the

open window and peered out. I saw that the window opposite was shuttered, I could see no one watching me ; the eaves were within reach of my hand, and, trembling, I thrust the packet under them, between the wall and the roof, and I rushed back to my bed."

" And the packet is there now ? " I exclaimed, unable to control my voice.

" Yes," she answered dully. " I suppose so."

" Then you never——"

" Removed it ? " with a shudder. " Oh, I dared not ! I dared not ! And I had no chance, for more happened. I was dressing, feeling very sick and ill, but still intending to tell someone, when the—the woman came in, half-dressed, and she had not been with me a minute—not a minute—before I knew that she was—was one of them. She said that she had dropped an ear-ring and she would search my room. But I knew—I guessed in a moment that she was searching for the packet, and I believed that if I betrayed myself she would kill me.

" I do not know how I had the strength to play my part, but I pretended alarm, affecting to believe that she suspected me, and for the time I deceived her. I even had the courage to make my vexation a reason for parting from her, and she made no difficulty. But she took care not to let me out of her sight for one moment; she followed me everywhere while I remained, and, God forgive me for my cowardice—I had not the courage to speak.

" Instead, I resumed my journey, reproaching myself bitterly with every league. But arrived at Altona, I found my father very ill and in danger, and in my anxiety I put the horror out of my mind. Still, I did not mean " —her voice broken with sobs—" indeed, indeed, I did not mean to be silent.

" I intended to call at the Embassy on my return and tell all. And I travelled to Berlin with that in my mind. But at Spandau, when I got out of the chaise they—they met me."

" What ? " I cried, amazed. " Do you mean that they dared——"

" The three ! Yes," dully. " The three ! They met me. They were there waiting for me. I was alone—it

was dusk when I stepped out—and they surrounded me, pretended to be my friends, silenced me, hustled me away with them, and before I could resist they pushed me into a chaise which was in waiting, and drove me on to Berlin. There they took me, terrified and vainly protesting, to a house in the suburbs.

"I know now that they had searched and searched at Perleberg and made certain at last that I had the packet. It is possible that my manner had deceived the woman only for the moment. At any rate, they kept me three days in the house at Berlin, starving me, questioning me, above all, threatening me"—with a shudder—"with Karl. They would make him put his great hands round my throat, and then while he half-strangled me, gloating over my pain and my terror, they would cry: "Tell! Tell! Where is the packet? Tell, or——'"

"The devils!" I cried, leaping to my feet in irrepressible rage. "Oh, the devils! But they shall pay me for that! Let me only get my hand on them! Let me—— But—but, why, Fräulein, did you not tell?"

"He trusted me," she said, shaking from head to foot. "But it was not that. If it had been that—only that—I should have told. I am a coward. But I dared not. I dared not. Don't you see? I knew that the moment they held the secret they would kill me. They would strangle me at once. They dared not let me go, for I knew all—they had boasted before me that they had killed him.

"So to give up my secret was to die—to die, do you see? But at last, seeing them grow desperate, and to win a day or two of life, I owned that I had hidden the packet—at Perleberg; and if they would take me there I would find it for them. It was a respite; it meant three or four days of life, and I thought that something might happen on the road, some means of escape offer, some chance of appealing to strangers.

"And at first I had hope. They took me for the night to a hotel in Berlin that they might make an early start, and there I—I all but"—she wrung her hands over the remembrance—"I all but got away from them. They left Karl to guard me, and he dozed. But when I had

crept to the door and was all but outside, he awoke, and he missed me and caught me on the threshold—oh, it was a bitter moment. A most bitter moment!"

'My God!" I cried. "If I had known! If I had only known! I saw your shadow, and if you had cried out—spoken, if you had——"

"He would have strangled me," she whispered. "Oh, yes, he would, he would! After that, each night—I suppose they wished to break me down—each night they made me think that they were going to kill me—that their patience was at an end, that they would wait no longer. Each night! They would talk before me, devising ways in which they might do it, and gloating over my terror.

"Once they told me that they would drop molten lead in my ear while I slept, and I think that they bought lead—I think they meant it. Another night they threatened to suffocate me with smoke and burn me with the room. They debated it before me—and the chances! And always to silence me there were Karl's horrible hands! They were never a yard from my throat, and they told me that nothing could be done to him—he was not responsible, he was half-witted. Oh, it was horrible! Horrible!

"Oh, d—n them, d—n them!" I whispered, shaking with rage. "If I get my hands on them!"

But she paid no attention to me. "Then at last," she said, twisting and untwisting her fingers, "we came here. They knew that you were following them then, and for the first time I think that they were afraid. They alighted at a village a league from the town and off the road, and we walked in after dark with my wrist tied to Karl's.

"They brought me here, and last night I felt sure that I should die, for I knew that if I did not now show them where the packet was they would torture me; and if I told they would kill me—kill me and bury me in the cellar—where he is buried. But I suppose that they were still afraid of you, for nothing happened last night. But I knew that the end would come to-night, and then——"

"And then?" I said, for she had paused.

"You came in." She looked at the door.

CHAPTER XXIII

Trapped

"Ay, I came in," I rejoined grimly. "And now we will go out!" I rose to my feet. The anger and indignation that I felt on her account overshadowed for the time the horrors that she had related. "We will go out! And woe to them if they try to stop us! Come! Be of good courage, Fräulein—it is over. But first—let me see if I cannot force this door without wasting a shot. If I cannot, I can still——"

She held up her hand. The flame of the candle wavered as if blown aside, and the girl's shadow on the wall swayed and hovered, as my ear caught far away in the hollow depths of the empty building a faint creak. She gripped my arm—she had already risen to her feet. "Wait! Wait!" she breathed. "Listen!" With fear-stricken eyes she strove to probe the shadows of the outer closet.

But her fear—that fear on which those cowardly wretches had so foully and so brutally played—only brought my rage to a white heat. Under the polish of civil life, and even, thank God, under the veneer of the Service, the natural man still lives, and for the moment it was uppermost in me. I longed for nothing so much as to come to blows with the murderers. "Coming, are they?" I rejoined. "So much the better, Fräulein! Let them come! And they shall receive something more than they expect!" For since I had heard the girl's story I had nothing less in my mind than to pay them the thousand crowns that I had offered—or one crown!

No, let them come, and Heaven help me if I did not turn the tables on them, and, if they withstood me, shoot them down like the dogs they were! "Let them come," I repeated, to reassure the girl. "And do you have no fear, Fräulein. The game is in my hands; I am armed—and well armed—and they have no woman to deal with now!"

"Oh, but I am frightened! I am frightened!" she

wailed, striving with all her little strength to detain me. "They are cunning! They are cunning as death! It was not without a purpose that they let us meet, that they have let us talk! I am sure—oh, I am sure of that."

"Pooh!" I said. "It was to gain a thousand crowns, Fräulein. I know them, believe me. But they have overshot the mark. In a few minutes you will be free, and they none the richer!"

I suppose that it was the opening of some very distant door that had caused the flame of the candle to flicker, for it was not until this moment that we heard the tramp of footsteps crossing the loosely laid floor of the great room. With the sound there came a murmur of voices and a laugh—a low, cruel laugh. And if anything could have hardened me in my purpose, it was that laugh.

As the footsteps halted at the door, and I heard the key grate in the clumsy lock, I thrust the girl behind me, and at the same time set up between myself and the light a broken corn-measure that chance had left on the table. This placed me in shadow, and when the door opened and the three came in, the two men jumping down while the woman remained poised on the threshold, I was ready for them, a pistol balanced in my hand. And, thank heaven, some skill with the pistol was in those days a part of a gentleman's education.

"Halt, there!" I cried. "Stand! If you come a foot nearer, you devils——"

"What will you do?" the man jeered. He seemed not a whit surprised.

"Shoot you down like dogs!" I retorted. "And murdering dogs you are!"

"Ho! Ho! You will, will you?"

"You've come for money, but you'll get lead!" I said, casting concealment aside. And as the man took a step forward I covered him. "Steady, if you prize your life or——"

"You'll shoot us, eh? Shoot us like dogs, will you?"

"Yes, I will," I cried, "and with pleasure! All the pleasure in life."

"You fool!" he snarled, swiftly changing his bantering

tone. "Fool! I drew the charges of those pistols two hours back—in the hall at the inn where you left them! Booby! Idiot!" with savage scorn. "They are harmless! As harmless as you, silly rabbit, with your neck in a noose! We've trapped you, *dummer Engländer*, trapped you. And your thousand crowns as well. Ay, fire away!" as in a rage I pulled the trigger and the flint fell futilely. "In ten minutes, if the stubborn little slut there does not speak, you will join your friend in the cellar! And moulder—moulder and rot there with him—both of you!"

Quick as light, but with despair in my heart, I flashed the second pistol at him—with the same result. I have since thought that I had done better then had I dashed out the light and taken my chance in the dark. But I had no time to think, and, thought apart, what else was there for me to do in that bitter moment of defeat, except what I did? I hurled the pistol at the man, and, clubbing the other, I flung myself upon him.

My aim was true, the weapon, short and heavy, struck him on his grinning mouth, and he went down as if I had hit him with a club. But my very success was fatal to me. Carried on by the impulse of my rush, I fell over him, and in a second the long powerful arms of the dwarf closed about me, his weight held me down, his horrible grasp sought my throat, clutched it, dug into it.

In vain, his hot breath on my neck, his wild-beast growl in my ears, I strove with all my strength to rise—strove desperately to cast him off. In vain. The pressure of his twining fingers, vice-like, strangling, grew tighter and tighter. My breast heaved, sparks shone and burst before my eyes, I was suffocating—suffocating! A last struggle, a blaze of light, and I lost consciousness.

When I came to myself, drawing deep and painful breaths, with tingling limbs and a bursting head, I did not for a while take in where I was, or even at the first know if I lived. I seemed to be in a vast cavern, stretching on every side to a dark horizon beyond the reach of dim eyes. I fancied myself alone, set solitary in the midst of this gloomy antre—which might, to my still reeling senses, have been Hades itself.

And for a space, holding but weakly to reality, I recalled no part of the things that had gone before, nor the circumstances which had brought me to this. I only knew that I was in great pain ; but this very pain it was that by and by had the effect of sharpening my perceptions. I began to notice things—that my stock was gone, my coat and shirt were wet, my face and hair dripping. My throat, too, hurt me vilely, and my wrists and ankles burned.

I tried to move and could not ; and by slow degrees enlightenment bitter as death penetrated to my mind. I was a prisoner. I remembered the struggle and its issue, I recognized that I was still alive, but bound hand and foot and helpless ; set, my back against something that I could not see, in the middle of the floor of the great chamber of the brewery. A yellow light, as of a lanthorn burning behind me, disclosed so much of the place as I could see.

I had barely tasted the bitterness of this knowledge, I had no more than tried the strength of the bonds that held me, my senses were still giddy with the shock of the discovery, when a sound broke the silence. I heard footsteps coming across the loose floor towards me. I heard sentences exchanged, but as the speakers were behind me and my neck was so sore that I could not turn my head, I could not see the speakers.

It was only when the Waechters appeared before me and stood looking down at me, the man with cruel malignity as he gloated over my helplessness, the woman with sombre eyes—it was only then that I appreciated the hopelessness of my case, and recognized that I was in the hands of those from whom I could expect no grain of mercy.

Though their eyes rested on me they continued to talk as if I had not been there. The woman said something about a light, a better light.

" Oh, there's light enough," the man answered in a muffled tone, and I saw that his jaw was bound up. " I want only enough to see the bolt, and if it takes more than one stroke to find it—he'll have the longer time to think where he's going ! That's all ! Do you see this ? "

He spurred me brutally with his foot and pointed to his bandaged face. "You did it, you devil! And you are going to pay for it." Then, to his companion, "Where's the girl?" impatiently. "Why doesn't he bring her along?"

"Oh, he'll bring her," the woman answered, her eyes fixed on me—and they had the same brooding look which had struck me so forcibly two nights before when I had watched her leaning over the sleeping girl. "He's bringing her now. But he'll want to do the work."

"Well, he won't!" the man snarled. "That's my job, and I mean to do it."

"It might be safer—to let him do it."

"D—n safety!" he retorted. "If you'd lost your teeth and a piece of your jaw"—with another ugly look at me—"your hands would itch for the bar as much as mine do. Besides, we're too deep in now to talk of safety." Then abruptly, "Will she speak?"

"I think so." The woman seemed to measure her words as she answered. "If anything will make her, I think this will."

"It was your idea," he rejoined. "And you're a woman and may know. But one way or the other is no matter. He'll go any way, and no loss and a thousand thalers gained. And if she hasn't spoken, well, we can try my way with her. We'll see if the lead won't persuade her. Make it hot enough, and I'll go bail she'll squeak."

"She may die first," the woman answered with, I fancied, a shudder, quickly repressed. "But that's your affair. Only I warn you, have a care that she does not follow him—and cheat you that way. Hold her fast, do you hear?"

"Karl will see to that," he replied. "He'll hold her, and fast enough, I'll be bound, if I tell him. Oh—he's bringing her. Then let's get this part over. But"—with a devilish glance at me—"not too quickly, either. No, my Englishman, not too quickly, either. For each of these teeth I'll have a price."

Not a syllable of their talk had escaped me, and to this day and this hour I can recall not only the slightest word that passed between them, but—so far as they were

visible to me—their looks and their bearing as they spoke. For though there was much said, and some said that I did not understand, though the more sinister points baffled me, I knew that it was the last, or a part of the last conversation that I should ever hear.

The man's evil face, the woman's sombre eyes, her shiver, rather suspected than seen, all were enough to convince me of this. And in truth hope was already dead in me—hope and all save the instinct to die with dignity—when the dwarf appeared, dragging the half-fainting girl by the waist.

Then for one moment, seeing her at their mercy, seeing her doomed to God knew what of shame and torment, seeing her frail slender form in the grasp of that unnatural brute, I lost my head. I struggled furiously, though I knew it to be useless—struggled with my bonds, striving desperately to rise.

I spat curses at them, I foamed at the mouth, and only—only when strength failed me, when the ropes cut to the quick and I fell over helplessly on my side, only when I read the evil triumph in the man's face and understood that I was but contributing to his enjoyment—only then did I recover the will to desist.

"That's better," he chuckled. "That's better. It's coming home to him now! That's what I like to see. That's worth all. You would knock out my teeth, would you?" setting me up roughly and at the same time kicking me savagely in the ribs. "And it will help us, too. It will help us with her, and it's well she is here. Bring her on, lad, bring her on! No—not too near. That will do. Stand there and hold her. And now, slut, you listen to me! Listen, do you hear? Do you know where your fine gentleman, so nicely trussed up, is sitting? Do you know? Do you know?"

In the weakest there is, I suppose, a residuum of strength upon which extremity can draw. The girl had been half-carried, half-dragged to the spot, and when I had first caught sight of her she had seemed to be swooning—to be barely conscious of her plight.

In appearance at least, terror had robbed her of three parts of her senses and of all her self-control. And my

foolish, futile outbreak, which in her eyes must have seemed the effect of sheer cowardice—though, indeed, it was not—this, one would have thought, would have been of all things the least likely to revive her courage.

Yet it seemed, on the surface, at least, to have that result. For, challenged by the brute who had kicked me, she stiffened herself, she lifted her head. Her features, though still colourless as paper, took on a firmer cast, and though no sound passed her parched lips, she shook her head.

"You don't?" the man repeated with gusto. "You don't know where he is sitting, eh? Your fine gentleman who thought to buy you? Who followed us and threatened us? And knocked out my teeth—for which he is going to pay, and pay high? You don't know, don't you?"

Again she shook her head. And now I saw that she stood alone, for Karl in his enjoyment of the scene had released her, and she stood erect, her pinched face hard to ugliness, her eyes watchful as a cat's.

"You don't?" the brute repeated. "Well, I'll tell you," with relish. "I'm going to tell you!" He stamped his foot on the floor beside me, and I felt the planks leap strangely under me. "Hollow, eh? Sounds hollow, does it? I'll tell you why. He's on the trap, d'you hear, wench? He's on the trap-door that they let fall when they lower the sacks.

"In the floor below there's another trap—under this—and it's open. And below that is another—to the cellar. To the cellar! You know what is in the cellar, wench? So if your fine gentleman falls through this"—and again he stamped upon it, his eyes glittering—"if he falls through this he falls plump—to the cellar! Where he'll join his friend, and there'll be no labour wasted in carrying him down, do you see?

"He's on the trap, my girl, and d'you see this?" He kicked an iron bolt that fixed in the trap-door and, passing through a staple in the floor, held up the platform on which I rested. "Do you know what that is? That's the bolt that holds up the trap!

"I knock it through with this"—and he picked up

an iron bar that lay beside him—"I knock it through with this, d'you see, and in five seconds your fine gentleman will be in Kingdom Come, with every bone in his body broken! And in half an hour more he'll be rotting with his friend—you know where! See!" he added. "See!" He swung the bar to and fro within an inch of the bolt.

The cold sweat broke out on my brow and upper lip "You devil! You devil!" I cried, seeing all now.

"Ay, you'd knock out my teeth, would you?" he retorted. "You'd knock out my teeth! It's my turn now. But you've a chance—you've a chance yet. See you"—to the girl—"it's your affair! It's for you to say. We give you five minutes, wench.

"Tell us where the papers are and we let him go, and you, too. But if within five minutes from now—he stepped behind me, and coming back with the lanthorn in his hand drew my watch from his fob and held up its face to the light—"if within five minutes from now, you slut, you don't speak, I knock out this bolt—I knock out this bolt, do you see? And down goes your man to hell—and you after him!"

"Don't!" I cried hoarsely. "Don't tell him!" And heaven knows it was not courage nor duty that spoke. It was despair. For I read the man—only too well I read his black mind. It needed not his cruel crafty face, it needed not the sinister scraps of talk that I had heard, to assure me that whatever she told and whatever she did, I was doomed—that the girl had been right, fatally right, when she said that, her story once told, we should not go out alive!

"Don't tell him!" I repeated desperately, even while my flesh crept as I pictured the depth below me and in fancy saw my body falling, dropping, whirling through space.

"D—n you, keep quiet, will you?" the man cried, and he struck me so heavy a blow with the iron bar that he knocked the breath out of me. "Shut your cursed mouth! It's not for you to choose; it's for the girl! You hear?" turning to her. "It's for you! Do you want to see him go? Do you want to hear his bones

crack? And then to follow him? If not, out with it! Give it mouth! There's a minute and a half gone already."

She stood mute, staring, her soul in her eyes. She stared at the bar, her face gleaming ashen through the gloom, and once I thought that her lips moved, that she tried to speak. But no sound came.

He waited. Then: "There's another minute gone," he said. He tapped the bolt lightly, playfully, and I felt, with an instinctive gathering together of all my body, the trap jar under me. "In three minutes it will be too late. Too late, my girl!"

Two minutes—and a half! I had that long to live, and then a hurtling through space, a crash, nothingness! But in the worst strait—as I now learned—the mind will still hope, will still seek a way of escape! And for one of those minutes mine wrought furiously, desperately, thrusting every way for some scheme, some trick, some anything, by which at this last moment I might baffle my fate or postpone it.

Was the man playing with me? Alas, I knew that he was not; nor in the woman's dark brooding face, nor the dwarf's grim features, set with eager inhuman interest on what was to follow, was there one gleam of hope or spark of mercy.

No, I read as little hope, as little mercy in their faces as in the gloomy cavern about us, that barred with light or dark, according as the horn or the metal of the lanthorn fell on beam or plank, was to be the last scene on which my eyes rested.

A minute—vainly spent, wasted in such thoughts. And then, thank God, I found strength to give the next to thought of another—to thought for this poor child, innocent, hopeless, timid, whom the same dreadful fate awaited, whom tragedy had swept with me into this web of death, who, frozen by terror, looked on, already bereft of sense and almost of life!

"Stay!" I gasped, for I had hardly recovered my breath. "Stay, man! I know where the papers are! I will tell you!"

Waechter shot round. "So!" he exclaimed. "You?"

"Yes, I. If you will let her go."

"Then out with it." His eyes sparkled with greed. "Where are they? Where are they, man?"

"No," I replied. "Not so. I know you. You would only murder me first and the girl afterwards. But let the woman take her to the Coffee House and bring back a note from the landlord to say that she is safe, and I swear that I will tell you."

It was a vain attempt; even while I made it I knew that it was a vain attempt. I knew that they dared not let her go. And even as I expected, he answered: "Ay, and have the police on us in five minutes! Fool! Dolt! Do you think that we are as stupid as you? No! Speak, speak, jade, or in another minute——" He waved the bar.

"Stay!" I cried, against hope. "She will swear—the girl will swear to be silent. In six hours you can reach the frontier, you can be gone! And you will have all that you want! For God's sake"—I turned to the woman—"don't lay this crime, this useless crime on your soul! For God's sake, spare her. She will swear to be silent."

But it was useless. Of course it was useless. The woman, indeed, seemed to me to waver, her face moved for a second by some ripple of fear or of feeling. But the man's brute sense met the appeal with scorn. "And be hunted from one end of Germany to the other!" he replied savagely. "Have Justus Grüner on our heels? And von Kalisch? Be chased with a price on our heads from Hamburg to Memel, and from Bremen to Warsaw? No! No! We'll make an end! Of you first, and then we'll try—we'll try another way with her!"

He raised the bar, and I thought one anguished wordless prayer, and closed my eyes—and then the girl shrieked. "Oh, I will tell! I will tell!" she babbled. "Oh, let him go! I will tell!"

I opened the eyes I had involuntarily closed. The child had fallen on her knees, her hands outstretched, and the hardest breasts, one would have thought, must have relented before that appeal, before that frail sinking form, that white face wrung with agony, those eyes wide with

the fear of that on which she dared not look. "Oh, I will tell!" she continued to cry—"I will tell!"

"Then tell! Tell!" the man commanded.

"Speak," said the woman, interposing more gently, for the girl was sinking forward and on the point of collapsing.

"In the eaves—over the window!" she panted. "Over my window! Oh, spare him. Let him go." And then—and I thank God for it—she fell forward insensible, swooning, dead to us all.

But—"Good!" was the man's only answer. "Good! Good! Then here's one witness out of the way!" And he swung the bar in the air.

But even while—in a fury of rage, for the girl's fall had altered my mood—I cursed him, the woman sprang forward. She seized his arm. "It is you that are the fool!" she hissed. "It may not be true, man—it may not be true. And you would throw away the tool that has served us! Wait! Wait, Waechter, till I see if they are there."

He lowered the bar unwillingly. "See?" he growled. "How will you see?"

"By looking," coolly. "How else? I will go now. In ten minutes I shall be back, and once I have them—you may do as you please."

He swung the bar idly, his eyes glinting, then he yielded to her and threw it down. "Well, be quick," he said, "or by G—d, you'll find the work done. I want it done, woman. We're not safe till it is done and they are under the soil—both of them. But there, it is fine talking, but how will you get into the room?"

"Trust me for that," confidently. "Only—do you wait till I come back and don't be a fool. And see Karl plays no tricks, do you hear? If the papers are there—if they are there, I'll have them within ten minutes, you may be sure of it."

CHAPTER XXIV

From the Depths

I HEARD the woman's steps go quickly down the stairs, heard the creak of the door at the foot. The girl lay on the floor where she had fallen, a huddled heap of white, for the wretches, once in possession of the secret, had not given a second thought to her. The man, after listening to the last echo of his wife's departure, began to pace feverishly up and down, stuffing a pipe the while, and now and again shooting an evil glance at me.

The dwarf picked up the bar and began to play with it, now twirling it in his monstrous hand as if it had been a stick, or again trying strokes with it, seeing how nearly he could brush the floor, or sweep by some outstanding nail without hitting its head.

To me black moments of black despair! Thoughts of home crowded into my mind as I crouched helpless above what I knew to be my grave. Thoughts of past hopes, past ambitions—hopes and ambitions that had made up my life, and had owned few limits.

Thoughts of easy, care-free days at the Office before responsibility was mine; again of later and fuller days, and finally of that sunny voyage to the South with pride and confidence at the helm—no more than six months back, yet it seemed to me in another life! Swift thoughts of Vienna, of my work there, of the retreat, of Iglau!

And could it be I who crouched here, fettered and hopeless, at the mercy of these vile miscreants, could it really be I who had played that part? Who had talked with Gentz and Metternich, who had felt so deeply the paltry sting of supersession, who had journeyed and bickered with poor Perceval—only, only, oh intolerable doom, to perish in the end by the same ignoble hands, to fall into the same dark secret grave, to leave behind me no name, no fame, no memory, but only the waning puzzle—some day perhaps to be raked up out of dusty annals—of an unknown fate! A little weeping at home, a little talk at the Office, a despatch, or two—and oblivion!

Black, black moments of despair! To die and moulder in the hideous depths of this deserted building, while the sun shone, and the world went on its way, and for a brief space men questioned, then wondered, then forgot! Forgot! Was it astonishing that overcome by the thought I rebelled? That again I let slip for a moment manhood, courage, self-control, and fought, fought furiously with my bonds, and hopeless as I knew it to be, spat curses, threats, abuse, at my captors, until once again I fell over and lay, breathless and exhausted, on my side.

This time the man paid no heed to my outbreak. He had ears only for the return of the woman and was so absorbed in listening that he did not even vouchsafe me a glance. It was the dwarf who this time came to me and playfully levered me up with his iron bar. "Fine sport!" he mouthed, stooping his horrible face to me. "Fine! Fine! But by and by, when we—" he went through the motions of striking away the bolt—"Finer! Finer! Oh, colossal! You will down—bump! bump! bump"!

I closed my eyes and strove to frame a prayer. Then I heard the girl moan, and I opened them. But she had not moved. She lay a mere heap of white, on the shadowy fringe of the circle of light cast by the lanthorn. The man, too, had heard her, and cast a careless glance that way, but beyond that he took no notice of her.

The dwarf still hung over me. "Fine! Fine!" he gibbered. "It will be fine when we—" and again he made a pretence of striking the bolt, and tucking in his chin and whirling his arms he mimicked the motions of a body falling headlong. "Fine! Fine!"

"Shut your mouth!" the man growled, "And stop that folly!" But I knew that it was out of no thought for me, no human feeling that he spoke. It was only that he was listening, that he would listen without interruption. And he had hardly uttered the words before, "Silence!" he snarled. "Do you hear, dolt? Do you want your head knocked off? Be quiet, fool! What is that?"

"She is coming back," the lad replied sulkily. "That's all. Can't you hear her?"

"I hear someone," the man muttered, and he shot a

devilish glance at me. "There is someone coming, to be sure, but——"

"Who else should it be?" the dwarf asked surlily.

"I don't know," the man muttered. "But it doesn't sound like——" He broke off and stood, waiting, staring—staring all ears and eyes in the direction of the door, that sunk in the gloom was barely, if barely, visible from where we were. I, too, could now hear the ascending footsteps—I heard them stop. It seemed to me that the woman had paused at the head of the staircase, just without the door.

The man peered into the gloom, and so infectious was his doubt, so eloquent of suspense his figure, that hope that I had thought dead leaped up in me. If it was the woman, if his accustomed ear had detected some change in the step—who was it? Who could it be? Or why, if it was the woman, had she paused on the threshold of the room, instead of entering?

She might be out of breath—it might be that, for the climb was a long one. But in that case——

A flash, that dazzled the eyes, a report that thundered in the roof overhead, and a figure, vaguely seen, leapt into sight, and into the room, came clattering across the loose floor. Waechter saw, and in a moment knew. He uttered a curse, he sprang to meet the man, then turned and leapt to recover the bar. "Any way," he roared, "he shall to hell before us! Quick, the bar! The bar!"

But—and that went half-way towards saving me—the dwarf, slow-witted and caught by surprise, dropped the iron, as the other snatched at it. It fell between them, they jostled one another as both strove to grasp it, and a brace of seconds were lost. Then the man secured the bar, swung it aloft and struck at the bolt.

He missed it—and almost lost his footing! But he had still a chance, the figure leaping across the floor was still half a dozen paces away, and the wretch, set desperately on his purpose, swung the bar aloft again.

This time he might have hit the bolt—I think he would have, though I roared at him—and at the last moment rescue might have come too late. But as the bar went up the girl—no one had thought of her or seen her rise—leapt

upon his back, and hurled him a yard or two forward. The blow crashed down, but it jarred harmlessly on the planks.

He had no third chance. Before he could recover his balance or shake the girl from her hold, the stranger was waving a pistol in his face, "Yield!" the unknown shouted, "or by the God above me, I blow your head off! Yield! Yield!"

And the stranger was but one of several. Men sprang, a crowd of them from the doorway, came hurrying across the floor, ran towards us, like hounds in view of their quarry. Waechter saw them and saw the pistol, but coward as he was, he was desperate. With the bar raised above his head he leapt on the leader. I looked to see the fellow, a small man, shoot him down.

Instead, the stranger jumped nimbly aside, evaded the blow, then springing in like a wild-cat, he clubbed Waechter mercilessly on the head with the butt of his pistol. The brute staggered back, dropping the bar, sought blindly to recover his footing, fell. In a trice three men were on him, binding him, while their leader drove back the gaping, mouthing dwarf, whose sluggish senses had not kept him abreast of the scene.

When—but not before—he, too, had been overpowered, and tied up, the man with the pistol took up the lanthorn and turned to me. And without surprise, for by this time I was beyond surprise, I saw, that my rescuer was Grüssbaum.

"*Gott im Himmel!*" he exclaimed, as he viewed my state, "What in the world were they doing to you, Excellency?"

I smiled feebly, but I could not speak. I did not faint, though I suppose I came near to it. But words were beyond me, and with a grunt of dismay Grüssbaum shifted the lanthorn and looked at the girl. She was leaning against a post, one of those that supported the roof, leaning, her strength all gone, and weeping as if her heart would break.

With rough kindness, he patted her on the shoulder. "No fear now, Fräulein. No fear now, and no harm. But if you'd wept five minutes ago instead of jumping on that brute's back there might have been harm! There, there, it is all over! It is all over. But—" turning the light once more on me, and speaking in a tone

of wonder, "what the devil were the knaves doing to him? And why, as that brute had the bar and his chance, didn't he knock out your brains, *mein Herr*, and have done with it? Instead of—but a knife," addressing one of his posse. "A knife, man. Cut these cords and set the gentleman on his feet."

Two men came forward and while one separated the cords the other severed them one by one. But when they lifted me, still speechless and smiling foolishly, to my feet, I could not stand. The men had to hold me up until something on which I could sit was brought; and the pain that followed, as the blood began again to run freely in my hands and feet almost unmanned me.

"Pheugh!" Grüssbaum muttered, holding the lanthorn once more to my face. "What the devil were they doing to him? Run, you, Stattler, to the Coffee House and bring some wine. And hurry, man, hurry. The young lady, too, will be the better for some."

But when the man had gone for the wine I found my tongue. "They were going—to drop me," I whispered, "through the trap—to the cellar!" And such a shudder—though the danger was over—seized me, as again caught away my voice.

"Ho! ho! So that was it!" Grüssbaum exclaimed, with the relish of a connoisseur adding a rare piece to his gallery. "That was it!" And going, with the light, to where I had been found he examined the trap-door and the bolt. "Here!" he said to one of the men. "Fetch the bar and knock this out!"

The man obeyed and under the second blow, the trap fell with a hideous clatter—hideous at any rate to me. Grüssbaum peered into the black hole, playing the light to and fro. "The next floor is open," he muttered. "I can't see farther. Do you," to the man, "go down and see if it is open to the cellar." Then to Waechter, "You devil!" he said, "I wish I had the right to drop you down! I'd knock out the bolt with pleasure."

"He murdered Herr Ellis," I muttered. "He's buried in the cellar—below this. She"—I nodded weakly towards the girl—"she knows. They told her."

"Ha! Well—I thought so!"

"You did!" I stared at him, the power to think gradually returning to me. "Why?" And then, remembering Frau Waechter, "But the woman? Have you the woman?" I cried.

"Neck and heels!" he replied, licking his lips. "We were on the point of forcing the door when she came out and we took her. *Gott!* If she had not come out we should have made a fine mess of it!"

"You would have been too late," I said with a shudder, and overcome by the thought I closed my eyes.

But the wine came, and refreshed by the draught, I stood up, leaning on his arm. "We'll go now," he said, looking round complacently. "You'll be better in your bed. But first I must give some orders. The three to the jail!" he continued briskly, in a voice of authority, "and see them well fettered. They'll be food for the *Reichsrichter*. And you, Hogner, go to the Governor and tell him that the job's done here, and all's safe—say, with my compliments that I was right about Herr Ellis and I've proof.

"But I'll be round with him in an hour, when I've seen His Excellency comfortable. And the young lady? To be sure, order a room and a warmed bed at the Coffee House and a woman to see to her. Do that first as you go. And let two men stay on guard here until to-morrow—we'll do what is necessary in the cellar then. That is all, I think. And now," turning to me, "if you can walk, *mein Herr*, we are ready."

"The Fräulein first," I muttered, drawing back. "And get a doctor for her," I added. "And some soup or something—at once. She has been in their hands a week."

"The devil she has!" he replied. "Well, the Grand Duchess will be satisfied now. Her Highness has sent to Berlin about her, and driven Herr Justus wild with her inquiries. I had an express about her yesterday and orders to search along the road. But come, *mein Herr*, come. The sooner you are out of this place, the better for your sleep to-night."

But I would not go until I had stammered a word of thanks to her, and seen her out. Then, more lights having been brought, we formed a slow procession down the

narrow, steep, worm-eaten staircase, and so through that hateful mildewed doorway, and out into the pure air of the night.

I looked up in reverent thankfulness, not without a pitiful thought of Perceval as I saw in the narrow slit of sky above us, a single star, shining calm and clear. Thence, we proceeded, dazzled by the smoky light of flares and pressed on by a hundred curious gazers, across the corner of the Shoe Market, to be welcomed on the threshold of the inn by an astonished landlord, who beamed upon us more benignantly than ever.

But when they were going to lead me to my old bedroom on the second floor I recoiled. "Not there!" I exclaimed, "anywhere but there!" For the room seemed to me to be pervaded by poor Ellis's presence, and I shrank from the thought of lying sleepless below the window which had witnessed that bloody scene. "Give me another room! Any other room!"

"Certainly, certainly, as the gentleman pleases," agreed the complaisant host. "And this room—the young lady may have it."

"No! No!" I protested, more strongly than before. "Rather I than she!"

"Well, good, good," the landlord agreed. But he looked his surprise. "We will manage somehow. Hurry," to a chambermaid, "and warm another bed, two beds—come and I will show you. In a minute, *mein Herr*, all shall be ready. In a minute!"

"In the meantime," said Grüssbaum, "you won't want me, Excellency. You are in good hands now."

"On the contrary I do want you," I replied testily, relapsing with a sigh of relief on a chest in the passage. "I want to know who you are, Herr Grüssbaum."

He smiled. "Well, not Herr Grüssbaum," he rejoined slyly. "Though as a travelling name it was very well. I am Herr Lieutenant Platen, assistant to Herr Grüner."

"Then all that at the barrier—about your sick wife and your poverty——"

"Was an old dodge," with smiling complacency.

"And the object?"

"That I might watch over you, unsuspected by anyone,

Excellency—even by you. You see Herr Justus was sure that either the persons you were in search of had fled the place long ago ; or that if they were still in Perleberg, and you by chance came on them, they would know more of you than you of them. In that event it was by an attempt on you that they would be most likely to betray themselves, and I was sent, not only to be on the look-out for that and the evidence it might furnish, but also to see to your safety.

" For the authorities had no mind to face the trouble that the disappearance of another Engländer would cause. But I had to watch you, unsuspected even by you, and to that end we could devise nothing better than the little rumpus at the barrier. You took me up in the presence of fifty travellers, to half of whom I had already applied."

" And suppose one of them had taken you in ? " I said.

" There was an officer at the barrier, who would have said I was a rogue and driven me off—for the time."

" But how did you know," I asked curiously " that I should take you up ? "

He looked at me, smiling—and no man could have been less like the sneaking, white-faced, down-trodden Grüssbaum whom I had befriended. " Well, you were English," he answered frankly. " And we thought that we had taken the length of your foot, Excellency. And you see we were right."

" And that was why," I exclaimed suddenly enlightened, " the police let you go at that place by the water."

" Yes. But you see I dared not give myself away in public even to the police—stupid fellows ! I had to see the Chief alone. Then it was simple."

" I see," I replied. " It puzzled me at the time."

" Yes, I had to tell you a little fiction—to quiet you."

I nodded. " And when did you begin to connect the Waechters—with the murder ? " I asked.

" To-day only ! This very afternoon, *mein Herr*, and not an hour earlier. But I had seen pretty quickly that they were blackbirds, gaolbirds ; and to put them off their guard, should they have any designs on you, I left you the moment we arrived here. But I only drove out a stage and in again by another road. Within three

hours I was back in Perleberg, had had the roads watched, and had made arrangements to have you shadowed wherever you went.

" Then to-day I got some scent of the murder, through a story a chambermaid told me of a woman and a girl who slept here the night Herr Ellis disappeared. I thought the story *louche*—queer, you understand, and I fancied that the woman and the girl smacked of the two in the Waechters' party. It had vexed me when you turned off the road to follow what I thought was none of your business. But when I had listened to the chambermaid's story, and had turned it over every way, I saw——"

" That I was not so foolish after all ! " I said, colouring a little—for I knew that it was no thought of Ellis that had sent me after them.

" No, not quite that," he replied with a gleam of humour in his eye, " but that you had shot at a pigeon and killed a crow, *mein Herr*. Which happens once in a thousand times. Unfortunately I took a little walk to turn the matter over, and see how it fell in with what I had seen of the young lady and the Waechters ; and, meantime, the foolish fellow who had shadowed you to that devilish place next door hesitated to break in the door until I could be found."

" I see," I said.

" And now," briskly, " to bed ! To bed, Excellency ! And I should recommend a doctor's draught, or you will be falling through that flap till daylight ! I'll send him to you, and I must go myself to the Governor. He's been on tenter-hooks lest something should happen to you. It would have made things unpleasant for him, you see."

He went, and presently the doctor came in his place, an old man in a cauliflower wig, who sat and propped his double chin on the gold knob of his cane, and gazed on me with owlish sagacity ; so that I could have fancied myself back again at Zerbst, with the portrait of the girl on its easel and glimmering at me out of the twilight of the curtained room.

And this it was no doubt that switched my thoughts once more to her—to her sufferings, ended now, thank God ! and her courage, that courage which had saved

my life, and in all her actions, now I came to trace them, peeped through the helplessness, and the weakness of the woman ; that courage which had nerved her to long silence, to endurance, to an incredible stubbornness, and in the upshot had saved my life and hers.

She had been for long but a face limned on canvas ; a face piquant and haunting but no more than this—just a portrait that had stirred my feelings. Then, a shadow to be followed, an enigma to be answered, a phantom elusive and perplexing, always in the van of me, always at a distance, rather glimpsed than seen. And again, at the most and last, an appeal, a creature crying out of helplessness to strength, out of weakness for succour—a debt, a task, a burden imposed on chivalry, and to be paid, if paid reluctantly.

Now, in a moment, a woman, slender, soft, of flesh and blood, desirable, my equal. I dwelt on her, and thought new and tingling thoughts of her—thought of her with a tenderness that brought me, shaken and overwrought as I was, to the verge of tears. And she was English, she was a stranger, and lonely and unprotected in this troubled, this foreign land.

On that reflection I rose up in bed ; and before I would swallow the old fool's potion, though Heaven knows I needed it for my brain was in a fever, I must question the doctor, I must send again to inquire how she did, and learn that all was well with her. For I had anxious, terrifying fancies about her. She might collapse, sink, die, while I lay here ! And it was not until I was assured that she had taken food and sunk into the dead sleep of exhaustion that I would consent to take my own medicine.

Still for an hour I turned and tossed, seeing ugly things, the cellar, Ellis ; falling a score of times as Platen had said I should through that hideous flap. I rose and lay down again. I cursed the doctor and all his futile works I reached for the bell. And then—I slept.

Dreamlessly, as far as I know. At any rate none of the dreams remained with me when I opened my eyes to the morning light, stared in wonder about the unfamiliar chamber, and slowly and with an aching head, recalled the things of yesterday. No longer feverish, I lay awhile,

thinking them over in detail, reviewing them in cold blood, but certainly in no thankless, no ungrateful spirit.

I passed the story through my mind, I saw whither I had so nearly slid, and I had time to think with remorse of Perceval—of poor Perceval, whom none had interposed to warn or save, who had been so cruelly and foully murdered in his duty. Ay, in his duty. And suddenly, as suddenly as if a pistol had been fired beside my ear, I sat up.

The despatches!

Heavens! How had I failed in my duty! From the moment of my rescue I had never given a thought to them! Absorbed in the peril I had escaped, *accablé presque jusqu'à en mourir* by the rush of events, and caught on the rebound by the girl, I had let their very existence and their hiding place pass from my mind.

After that not a moment, not an instant must be lost if I was to rest. I dared not, and would not, trust any one! I leapt out of bed, I huddled on some clothes. I sallied out, and, heedless of an astonished maid whom I overset in the passage, I flew up the flight of stairs that separated my present chamber from my old one. Without delay, without a second's hesitation, caring not who might be in the room, I knocked at the door.

I got no answer, and it was no time for ceremony. I opened the door. Joy! The room was empty, though an unmade bed showed me that it had been occupied. I took three steps to the window, that tragic window which had played so great a part in the story, and leaning from which I had had that strange monition of Ellis's presence. I flung it open—no thought of monitions now—and thrust out my arm. I could reach the eaves with ease, and with a beating heart I felt between wall and roof, first on one side of the window and then on the others

But my hand, far in as, leaning recklessly out, I thrust it, encountered no packet, no foreign body, nothing! Then with a pang of misgiving, I began a systematic search. From the one side, foot by foot, I passed my hand to the other. But the result, though I feverishly repeated the search, repeated it more than once, the result was the same. I found nothing. Nothing!

The despatches were gone!

CHAPTER XXV

Found

They were gone, beyond doubt or question, and stunned by the discovery, I sank back on the bed and stared at the blank wall. And how I cursed my stupidity! How I cursed my negligence! Why had I not, the moment that I entered the house, made for the hiding place and secured the papers? Or failing that, and making allowance for the shock I had sustained, why had I been so astoundingly silly as to refuse to return to my old room—the room, where my presence, though it did no more, would have made it difficult for another to lay hands on the packet?

And excuse I had none. Not a jot, not a tittle. Out of my own mouth I must stand condemned. For would any one believe, could I plead to any reasoning creature, that I had forgotten the despatches? Forgotten the very soul and essence of my mission at the moment when it became most important? For with poor Perceval dead, and his slayers arrested, what remained?

What of import half so high as the recovery of the papers for which he had given his life, the papers which so many had sought, for which so many had died or were to die, which Klatz, the French, the Waechters, all had hunted with so blind, so furious a persistence? And which only fortune and a girl's courage had preserved, so that for a brief hour they had lain under my hand, to take or leave?

And I had left them. I had left them!

I spent some bitter moments, thinking the matter over, and dwelling not only on the trouble which might ensue between the Chancelleries—which depended, of course, on the hands into which they had fallen—but on the effect this must have on my own career. Men are judged, and nowhere is this more true than in the Office, by results.

With the despatches in my care, saved at my risk and by my exertions, I might have hoped that my unfortunate parting from Ellis—though I must ever in my heart

recall it with sorrow—would be overlooked. But if I returned empty-handed, without the despatches, then most certainly I should be placed on my defence, and I should be hard put to it to make out a case. Nay, I knew well that I could make out no case that would satisfy the Chief.

Yet, was the matter hopeless? Were the papers gone beyond recovery? I began to consider. There was just a bare possibility that Norma Mackay under the stress of suffering had made a mistake; that she had either forgotten where she had hidden the packet, or had described the hiding place so ill that a false impression of it had been stamped on my mind. But I set little faith and less hope on this.

No, she had secreted the papers where she had told us, and within the last twelve hours, during which the secret had ceased to be hers, they had been removed, either by an agent of the Waechters—who might have got speech of them in the gaol—or by some one who with aims of his own to serve, had learned from them what they knew—and what only they and I and the girl did know.

That person might be in the French interest, or in the German: for in this matter I could trust no one, not von Kalisch, not even Platen. And yet the thing perhaps was not hopeless. If I challenged the possessor at once, and while the scent was hot, something might be done. But I must act quickly—quickly and with assurance.

I opened the door and went out. The first thing I had to do was to dress myself. But as I hurried down the stairs with that in mind, I came upon the chambermaid whom I had seen as I went up. The sight of the woman started a new hare, and I stopped and went back to her. "Who had that room—last night?" I asked, pointing to the door. "Someone slept in it?"

"So!" she said, staring up at me, for she was on her knees. "That room? One of the French gentlemen from the floor below. He offered to remove to accommodate *mein Herr*."

My heart sank. "Oh!" I said. "One of the French officers?" Then, "How long, *meine Kammerjungfrau*, have they been here—the French guests?"

"A week or more, *mein Herr*."

"Doing what?" impatiently. "What is their business?"

The woman spread out her hands. "*Ich weissd nicht*," she said.

I asked no more, but all my suspicions confirmed, I plunged into my room and dressed. Then down into the hall hot-foot, where I found the good-natured landlord. He beamed on me doubtfully, astonished to see me abroad so early. "Is the *Wohlgeborener Herr* prudent to be about so——"

"Yes," I said, cutting him short. "I am in trouble. Have you seen the Lieutenant of Police Platen?"

"Surely, *mein Herr*. He went out ten minutes ago." And reading the question my eyes put to him, "To the Governor's, where he has the honour to breakfast, I believe."

I was through the door and in the street almost before the words had passed his lips. I hurried along under the painted signs and by the mob-capped short-skirted Mädchen who were whitening the steps. I saw the wide grass-grown Market Place open before me, saw the couchant bulk of the Cathedral, caught a glimpse of Grey Roland, the next moment I knocked at the spotless green door of the Governor's lodging.

The pleasant-faced girl who had admitted me before opened the door. I brushed by her without a word, and it was not until I stood in the presence of the Governor and Platen and read the astonishment their faces betrayed, as they viewed the uninvited guest, that I bethought me that I had not arranged what I would say.

Habit, however, goes for much; in a trice I had determined to hinge my offensive on the French officer, and "Pardon me, Herr Governor," I said, hat in hand, "I am in great trouble. I am thankful to find you, with my friend here. If you will be so good as to continue your meal I will explain. The despatches——"

"Ah, the despatches?" Platen said, taking me up and nodding. "That's it, is it? Have no fear. We shall wring the secret out of them. A little patience and a little pressure, and a good examining judge, and rest assured——"

"But wait! Wait!" said I. "The Waechters never had the despatches. They never got them. It was not until ten minutes before you entered that they learned where they were hidden."

"Hidden?" Platen rose to his feet and sat down again, his face as keen as a terrier dog's. He cracked his fingers. "Hidden, eh? And not by them? Then I was right when I suspected that the woman's search in that bedroom had to do with them?"

"You were," I said. And then, pretty certain from his manner and from the surprise which I read in von Kalisch's face—he looked more like a student than ever this morning, with his spectacles and his short fair beard—that they were innocent of the theft, I recalled also that they had not heard the full story. And I proceeded to enlighten them.

"Ho! ho!" the Lieutenant cried when I had done, "I thought that something like that was at the bottom of it. But a clever girl! Clever and staunch! And a good thought, too. But—" he shook his head—"if the police had searched——"

"Just so," I said. "But they did not. Or—" with a keen look first at him and then at von Kalisch, "perhaps they did—and found them?"

"What?" Platen exclaimed, and he rose cracking his fingers again and looking more than ever like a terrier on a scent. "I see, I see. You've looked, Excellency—and they are not there. That's it, is it?"

"That's it," I said heavily.

"Are you sure that you did not mistake the room?"

"Quite sure. There is only one room that looks on the brewery gable. The chambermaid too, identified it for me when she told me the tale. If you," with a little lingering suspicion, "know nothing about it?" I looked from one to the other.

The Governor shook his head. The Police Lieutenant, who had sat down again, stretched out his legs and thrust his hands deep into his fobs, "Innocent," he said. "Quite innocent!" And I believed him.

"Then," I decided, "there is only one explanation. The Waechters must have contrived to convey the secret

to some one on their way to the gaol—and the papers were removed during the night."

"During the night?" von Kalisch exclaimed, and they both stared at me. "But surely you searched as soon as you——"

I groaned. "I ought to have," I said. "But the truth is—I am ashamed to avow it, Governor—I was so shaken last night that I never thought of the despatches until I awoke this morning."

"Umph!" Platen muttered. "Well, I don't wonder. No. But you may be sure of one thing. I can trust my people, and I will answer for this, *mein Herr*, that the Waechters had no chance of passing out word or sign—last night."

"Yet the papers are gone this morning," I retorted, "and the room was occupied last night by a French officer, who moved in, ostensibly, to accommodate me. He may have been the Waechters' accomplice?"

Platen shook his head.

"Or the agent to whom they hoped to sell the papers? He may have been waiting here to receive them—waiting on the chance that the packet would come to hand?" I turned to the Governor. "Who are these Frenchmen—there are two of them. How long have they been here? What is their business?"

Von Kalisch fingered his light, pointed beard and I could see that neither my manner nor the subject was palatable. Platen looked thoughtful, but did not interpose. "Well," the Governor said at last, "they are on furlough from Magdeburg, if you must know, sir. One is an invalid, and the other is studying German. I know," reluctantly "no more than that."

"They must be seized," I cried, "and searched—searched at once!"

Platen laughed. The Governor stared. "Oh, impossible," he said stiffly. "We have nothing against them. They are quiet, peaceable——"

"Frenchmen!" I cried. "And they have got those despatches!" I spoke aggressively, for I already recognized that I was fighting a losing battle. Already I felt that the atmosphere of the room was changed. Even the attitudes of the two men were no longer the same.

They sat on guard, stiff, rigid, watchful lest they should be committed to anything, and determined that they would not be tricked or blustered into a false position. I was confronted, I saw it clearly, by that fear of the conqueror which enslaves the conquered, by that fear of France which for three years had held Germany in thrall, and which to every official from Stein and Hardenburg to the meanest town-crier was an abiding and subduing presence.

"We have no evidence of that," said von Kalisch at last.

"None," said Platen with a face of wood. "Still"—as one conceding a great point—"we might have them shadowed perhaps."

"Ay, back to Magdeburg!" I cried scornfully. "Over the border!" And I rose to my feet in a rage. "If that is all you can do, gentlemen, a fig for it!"

They looked at me stonily, keeping their seats. The Governor took off his glasses and rubbed them. "Certainly, without evidence, we can do no more," he said. "To do even what the Lieutenant of Police Platen suggests might be going in my judgment too far. These papers may have been found by someone by chance."

"By chance!" I cried.

"By the chambermaid," Platen said smoothly. "She may have been led to hunt for the ear-ring and come on the papers."

"Under the eaves! Outside!" I retorted. "And in that case would she have told the tale of the ear-ring and the search? To me? To you?"

He shrugged his shoulders. "The unlikely happens," he said woodenly.

I saw that, friendly as he had been, I could no longer look to him for help, but that on the contrary the notion of interfering with the Frenchmen had paralysed them both. And in a passion I reached for my hat. But with my hand upon it I had an inspiration. I remembered the Prince of Eckmühl's passport—it enjoined all into whose hands it might come to aid, forward, and support me.

Fortunately, secreted in a pocket in my shirt, the letter had escaped the Waechters' search, and I dived for it,

while the two watched me. When I had extricated it, I handed it to the Governor. "Enough!" I said with arrogance—but I knew well that with a German arrogance serves. "You've seen this once, Herr von Kalisch, but I think you must have forgotten its purport. There is your authority, and I call upon you to act upon it."

He read it, an angry flush on his cheek-bones, his eyes hard—to take orders from an enemy, there are easier ways than this out of a difficulty! In silence, he handed it to Platen, and Platen read it. The Governor received it again, perused it once more, still in silence and with a pinched, wintry face. And I have no doubt that, as he recalled the trouble that from first to last this wretched affair had given him, and foresaw that which it was likely to give him in the future, he wished all Englishmen at the devil.

"Well," he said at length, his manner of the coldest, "I will consider, sir, what, if anything, can be done. If you will be good enough to call upon me at noon I will inform you of my decision."

I saw that this was as much as I should get—and lucky to get it! And I thanked him and made my adieux, adding some words of acknowledgment which I hoped might reconcile him to the position. But friendship is more easy to break than to mend, and I was bowed out, from the waist upwards with more formality than freedom.

I had played my last card, and it might be unwisely, for it is a maxim in the Service that a friendly neutrality is of more value than an unwilling alliance. However, it was done, and the card played, for good or ill.

I left the house with little hope and in low spirits. To have come so near to success, to have had it within the grasp of my hand, and to have let it slip through my own neglect—no wonder that I walked with my head bent, or that I ignored, thankless and ungrateful as I was, the great mercy which had within the last twelve hours preserved me from a dreadful fate. For, alas, it is the way of the world to let the bitter drop at the bottom of the cup poison the good wine that sparkles and mantles above it!

With no knowledge of how I had come there, I found myself again at the door of the inn and I entered and stood wondering gloomily what I should do next. What indeed

remained to do? And then with a lift of the heart, with a lightening of the spirits, which surprised me as much as it changed me, I thought of the girl—ay, there still remained that.

A servant was crossing the hall. I sent her upstairs to inquire how the Fräulein had slept. "I should wish to see the young lady," I added, "if she is well enough to receive me. Inquire, will you?" And I turned away, with an air of indifference assumed as much to deceive myself as the maid.

I waited, deep to all appearance in the study of an *Eilwagen* time-table that hung on the wall beside the washing-tap and the roller towel. Ah! She had slept well, had she? And would be glad to receive me. I went up the stairs, the lower ones two at a time; the upper ones more slowly, for I was seized with an unaccountable fit of shyness.

It occurred to me that I did not know what I was going to say to her. I felt a lack of words and ideas that was new to me. And outside the door which a chambermaid held open, I would have paused to collect myself if the woman had not been there, broadly smiling.

"She goes on well?" I muttered. I was out of breath—the stairs no doubt.

"*Überaus!*" the woman replied and smiled more broadly.

I went in. Beside the stove at the foot of the bed I saw a forlorn figure sunk low and almost hidden in the depths of a great chair—a little figure, all eyes. Then my sight cleared, I perceived details; a pink and white wrapper, borrowed doubtless from someone in the inn, and rising from it a delicate, flower-like head, overweighted by coils of dark shining hair; and turned towards me a pale face, the eyes so dark and large and troubled that for a moment I imagined the girl as I had always seen her—the scared, pitiful, terror-stricken victim of a tragic situation. As I crossed the floor, muttering something inadequate, and she rose shakily to her feet, with her solemn eyes fixed on me, the illusion persisted.

But as our hands met, there came a change. The flower bloomed, the blood mantled in the delicate face,

crimsoned the slender neck, the little ears, mounted painfully to the tendrils of the hair. And though she still held her head erect, though she faced me bravely, denying as it were her own confusion, her eyes wavered and fell—and I had the most delicious sensation of my life.

For a moment she was the portrait of my memory, the portrait that had so long and so persistently haunted me; but the portrait transfigured, made flesh and blood, made a hundred times more lovely by emotion.

"How can I ever thank you enough!" she whispered.

"Or I you?" I replied.

And then I found that I was still holding her hand, and colouring in my turn, I let it go. For what had passed between us that could warrant me in retaining it?

And yet—and yet now that I had let it go, I reflected that things had passed between us that might stand warrant for much—things that transcended time and overleapt punctilio—danger, self-sacrifice, life, death, things strong as steel to bind us together. And now that it was too late, I regretted that I had let her hand go—the little, trembling, passive hand, that yet had been strong enough to save life, to save my life.

The more as I could find no words to say to her, no words that as between us would not sound silly and futile, would not sink to the depths of bathos. She had dropped back into her chair, and I remained standing before her—for there was no second chair. I repeated something banal about sleep—hoped that she had slept well—had not been troubled by dreams, had not——

"Dreams," she repeated, yet with an irrepressible shiver. "No, I thank you, I slept well." She spoke, I was surprised to see, with ease. For her, it seemed, the bad moment had passed and she was again mistress of herself, and so much mistress that something like a smile trembled on her lips. "The doctor gave me a sleeping draught," she continued. "And you, too, I hope, Mr. Cartwright? I am sure that you must have needed it."

"Yes," I assented stupidly. And that—shade of Canning!—was all that I—I who had bearded the Ball Platz and bandied arguments with statesmen!—could find to say. I stared at the stove; she must think me

an idiot! Not that things to say, many things, were not welling up in my mind, but I did not know how to say them. They seemed to be such—such impossible things to say when nothing had gone before to lead to them. And after all a man must break ground.

Well, I could do that. But how? Ay, how?

"It was a terrible, terrible time!" she murmured. "I do not know, I cannot think how I lived through it. Or how I can ever, ever thank you enough, Mr. Cartwright. But for you—but for you—" She faltered, and suddenly broke down, overcome by remembrance, unable to finish her sentence.

And on that I saw her once more as the lonely pathetic little figure, the panic-stricken, white-faced, despairing girl whom I had watched in the crowded inn by the water, in the sinister house beside the forest, in that accursed brewery last evening. She was once more the lonely child whose woes had pierced my heart, who had cried to me for succour, who had challenged the small remains of chivalry that the world and the world's ways had left to me. And seeing her so, on a sudden I found words and courage.

"And but for you," I rejoined, leaning forward, "but for you where should I be? And for thanks," I continued and I stepped forward until I stood over her, looked down on her, dominated her, "I can tell you how you can thank me. But to thank me in the way that I wish will be a long task, a life's task, Fräulein. Still, I can tell you, and I will tell you. And perhaps some other day, when you know me better, on some later day, if not now, you will answer me. But—what is it?" I broke off, for she had risen in confusion. "What is it? You are surely not afraid of me?"

"Oh, no, no," she stammered. "But," in a disorder that I found delightful, "but I had forgotten something. Something that I ought to have told you——"

"Told me?" I rejoined. "It will keep. Never mind that now, I beg."

"No, no, something," her breath coming short and quick, "that I ought to have given you—at once, Mr. Cartwright. The chambermaid got it for me before I

slept. I could not rest until—until I knew that it was safe." And slipping deftly by me, for I was very close to her by this time, she stepped to the head of the bed. She drew something from beneath the pillow. "I think it is quite safe" she murmured. "But—but I could not be easy until it lay in your hands, Mr. Cartwright. It has not been opened I am sure."

And, still averting her eyes from mine, standing so that her chair, a confounded big chair, was between us, she gave me a packet.

I took it mechanically and I gazed at it—as soon as I could switch my thoughts on to it—as one stunned. My G—d, the despatches! The despatches! The worn and abraded leather case, strapped and sealed with Ellis's seal! Which I had seen in his hands a dozen times, which had cost him his life, which had come near to costing me both life and honour!

Conscious as she was, she could not refrain from a little fluttering laugh, as she viewed my astonishment. "It is all right—I hope?" she said.

"Right?" I cried. "Right? It is indeed right! You have saved my honour as well as my life!" And precipitately, without another word, and very greatly, I must suppose, to her amazement, I turned and flew from the room, I bounded down the stairs. And not a moment too soon.

As I leapt from stair to stair I heard Platen's voice and the Governor's in the hall below. Heavens, if they had already—but, no, they had not had time, and even as I framed the fear, I stood before them, panting and speechless—but holding out the packet.

"Ah!" said Platen, taking in the position at a glance.

"Fräulein Mackay!" I gasped. "She secured them through the *Kammerjungfrau*—before she slept!"

"Ah!" said the Governor in his turn, and his eyes gleamed sardonically behind his spectacles. "You had better add her to the Service, I think."

Platen nodded. "A very remarkable young lady," he commented. "Then that is over?"

But by this time I had got myself in hand. "Not quite," I rejoined. "I owe you, Herr Governor, my

humble apologies. And to you also, and even more to my friend, Herr Lieutenant Platen, the expression of my sincere and for-the-duration-of-my-life-lasting gratitude. I trust that you will honour me by shaking hands with me."

They did so a little stiffly. But then, seeing, I think, that my eyes were not dry, for I was deeply moved, they gave way and they kissed me *coram publico* on both cheeks. "Not," said Platen, tapping me lightly on the breast above the place where I had deposited the precious packet, "that I am not tempted to rob you, even I. I wonder," and there came a gleam of excitement, a glimmer of greed into the little man's eyes, "what is in them. Those wonderful, those fateful, those fraught with all manner of mischief despatches!"

"Ah, I wonder," I rejoined, laughing foolishly, my heart lighter than it had been for weeks. "But you will both, I beg, sup with me to-night. I request the honour, Governor, I press it, and will take no denial. And our host shall give us of his best and of the oldest bin that he has in his cellar."

"To be sure," Platen smiled. "You owe us that for the thousand thalers we recovered for you. And we will toast the Fräulein Mackay."

"A most remarkable young lady," said the Governor again.

"Yes," I said, turning towards the stairs, my foot as light as a feather. "We will toast her. I had forgotten that. I must go to her now and thank her."

"A good journey!" Platen cried after me. The little man's eye was keen.

I rapped at her door—at any rate I ought to have done so, and I hope I did. But it mattered little, for I was sure that she expected me, perhaps even that she already knew my footstep. When I burst in upon her, she was standing in the middle of the floor, awaiting me, yes awaiting me, red as a rose and looking a little as if she would cry.

And the big chair was no longer before her, or I took no heed of it. What was between us, what passed between us, how I broke that ground, how I said that which had seemed so difficult, so out of the question, so impossible a few minutes before—shall I tell it?

No, a hundred times, no! There are blossoms so tender they fall at a touch, things so sacred that to tell is to tarnish.

The more as it fell to my lot that day to do that which must be told. For late in the afternoon I heard that the Lieutenant of Police was inquiring for me in the hall, and going down I found him waiting. I fancied that he looked a little unlike himself, and he was tossing off a glass of Schnapps. "You'd better have one, too," he said, and without consulting me he gave the order. "The young lady's evidence," he continued, dropping his voice as he drew me aside, "is confirmed—to the letter. Our men have been digging in the cellar—over there, and we want you to identify."

I felt my colour fade, and with a hand that shook a little I raised the Schnapps to my lips and drank it. "It is necessary?" I asked, shrinking inwardly. "But no—I will come of course. I owe him that."

"He had been stabbed in the breast, precisely, as she said," Platen explained in a low voice, as we went out and turning the corner of the Shoe Market, entered that detested lane. "Twice, but the surgeon says that the first blow was fatal. No doubt we could prove the identity without your assistance, Excellency, but the shorter way is the better."

I did not speak, I could not. I had a horror of the ordeal before me, which was not lessened by the surroundings which awaited us in that abandoned building, gloomy even at noontide. The way to the cellar was by a ladder, down which we groped, assisted by the yellow smoky beams that shone upward from the lanthorns of the knot that waited, silent or now and again conferring in awed whispers, round a gruesome opening in the earth.

I staggered a little as I reached the foot of the ladder, but Platen took me by the arm and led me forward. The men drew aside to make way for me, and two of them at a sign from the lieutenant held up their lanthorns so as to throw a light on that which lay there—so pitiful, so pitiful a sight, framed as it was in the rough heaps of soil and rubble which the diggers had cast up out of the grave.

He was not greatly changed—not as much as I had

feared. I forced myself, though my flesh quailed, to take one long look. " I identify him," I said, my words breaking the hush of expectation that surrounded me.

" Murdered—foully murdered," I added. And overcome by emotion, weakened by what had gone before, I turned away, unable to control my feelings. The face which I had last seen in the room at Wittenberg, from which I had parted in querulous anger, that face of one who, if we had not always agreed, had been long my companion and ever and always an upright, honest English gentleman—the face of one who in direst peril had given his last thought to his duty—no wonder that as I turned from it, pallid and earth-encrusted and sadly changed as it was, I bowed my head against the rough wall and wept.

That all his hopes, his promise, his aims, his success should have led only to this ! Should have ended here ! And it might be, it might well be, I thought with bitter remorse, through me !

Ah, that I had had more patience, more tolerance, a clearer prevision !

For a moment Platen let me be while he gave some low-voiced directions, and it was not until we stood outside those abhorrent walls, in the free air and blessed light of day, that he spoke, " Well, the worse for them," he said, his face set in so grim a mould that I hardly knew the man. " The earth will be rid of them. The Judge shall take the young lady's evidence to-morrow, and we shall then be able to release her for the present."

The Governor had joined us, and partly to prove that I had regained my composure, partly because the point was not clear to me, " How did they lure him—into that place ? " I asked.

" Simply enough," Platen replied. " Waechter—he, of course, was the postilion."

" Oh, but," I cried, my attention caught, " that is not so. Waechter was not the postilion. I should have known the postilion in a moment ! He had very thick black——"

" Eyebrows," Platen said drily. " Just so. He had. But he was Waechter all the same. Did you notice that

Waechter shaved his eyebrows? I knew him for a jail-bird by that—the moment I saw him."

I had not noticed it. I had only remarked a something sinister and unnatural in his face, but I had not traced it to its cause.

"No doubt when your friend left the Governor's house at nine o'clock he undertook to guide him to the Coffee House. Probably he told him that he could take him in by a quieter way—the ball was in progress, the hall crowded. He brought him round the corner and opened the brewery door—perhaps at the last moment he hustled him in. The other two had been watching their movements and were there to meet them.

"Inside, your friend took the alarm I expect, saw that his retreat was cut off, and, seizing a light which they had placed at hand, perhaps at the foot of the stairs, he must have run up ahead of them hoping to barricade himself in some room! He reached the little room at the top opposite the gable of the inn, but he could not secure the door."

"But suppose—he had not gone to the Coffee House?" I suggested.

"If he stayed the night in Perleberg—and they had made up their minds that he should—he must have gone to one or other of the two inns. Next door to the other inn, the Golden Crown, there was at this time an empty locked-up shop, and the Governor tells me that it was broken open that night—complaint was made to him next morning, but of course he did not connect it with the Envoy's disappearance. So it is pretty certain that they had their trap set for him beside each inn."

"Well, I hope to heaven," I cried, "that they will pay for it."

Platen smiled—a crooked smile. "Justus Grüner will see to that," he said. "You may trust him."

In the hall I parted from them, and I went upstairs with an aching heart. Poor Perceval! Poor Perceval! And in part, in part, alas, through my fault! I groaned.

But, as I paused at the head of the first flight, I caught sight of a plaintive little face watching for me in the dusk of a passage, and I was comforted.

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